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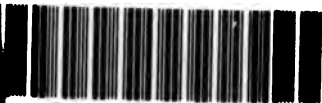
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ROOK'S
DANCE





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ROOK'S DENE.

BY

J. W. LAMSON.

"The question whether a handful of the clergy are, or are not engaged in a hopeless and visionary effort to Romanize the Church and people of England . . .
"At no time has such a scheme been possible!"—EXPOSTULATIONS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

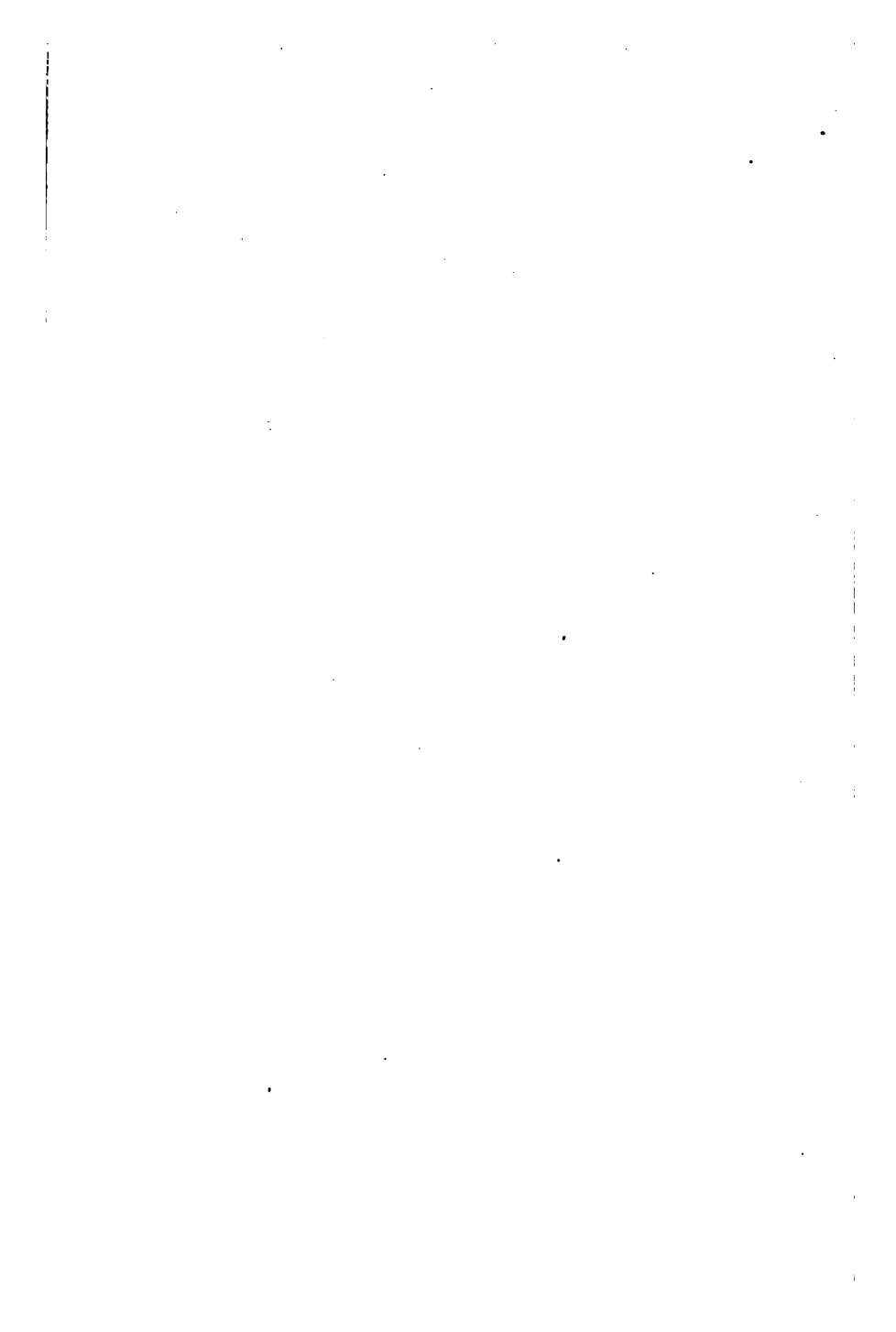
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CHAPTER I.

A SEASON IN LONDON.



IT does not belong to our purpose to accompany the fair Cecile in her worldly experiences, which in most respects were of the stereotyped character, and like those of other young ladies.

It is to be remembered that Cecile started with more experimental knowledge than most belles of a season, for though not long out of her teens, her life

had not been a narrow one, or without variety.

She was greatly admired and not a little courted, notwithstanding many who thronged her mother's drawing-rooms were what the world called queer and *outré*, yet not a few of the young and *distingués* of the day were drawn there to do homage to the daughter.

This young lady's great charm was her perfect naturalness and honesty, and this was insensibly felt by all who came under her influence, or cared to draw her from her usual modest reserve.

For once, Lady Ethel was an indefatigable mother, and did the duties of chaperone with praiseworthy zeal and becoming grace. Yet it could not fail to be apparent to all who observed her closely, that her heart was very little in ball and rout, dinner and opera, reception and concert to which she followed the fascinated Cecile night after night.

Occasionally, upon some plausible pretext of indisposition or excessive fatigue, the charge of the young lady would be committed to the step-father, a thoroughly good and respectable nonentity who was always happy and ready to escort the maiden, to whom he was really much attached, and was in fact very proud of affecting paternal relation to so captivating a belle. In truth, he often declared that few other men could show such a wife and daughter.

By coincidence, or otherwise, these occasions of her own retirement at home found Lady di Spagna in the midst of interested gatherings in her own sumptuous mansion, where music and dancing were not the order of the entertainment.

CHAPTER II.

LA COUR DES MIRACLES.



AND here we propose to lift the veil upon a scene which will perhaps be regarded as a travestie rather than a revelation. Were the devices and methods of the propagandism that uses such centres of enthusiastic zeal as Lady di Spagna well understood, they would become harmless ; that they exaggerate neither the unscrupulousness of the system nor the self-sacrificing zeal of its devoted servants, no

one will pretend who knows anything of either.

A system that has become a law to itself and supplemented every other in the individual conscience need never pause in the choice of its methods, nor lack instruments for its work. No avenue is short, no employment too ignoble to stagger the faith of its followers. Armed with the *open sesame* of its supreme rule of right and wrong, and the self-annihilating conditions of its service, every task is both sanctioned and dignified. Let us not then be thought trifling or fanciful, as we introduce the reader to this gathering of Lady di Spagna and her co-workers.

Here are met, as might be supposed, pious friars and holy fathers, saintly sisters and vowed superiors, with quiet laymen and unobtrusive women to consider and report the progress of their cause in Anglo-Saxon homes, and reckon the sum of precious offerings which in

the form of vulgar coin, or costly gem, pious hands had collected for the papal prisoner so infamously immured within the dreary walls of the Vatican.

It is not a betrayal of confidence to repeat here the mutual congratulations over the marvellous successes that had rewarded their efforts and rescued such and such a one, and added one and another bright illustrious name to the pontifical obedience. It is not treason here to point out the infinitude of little webs woven and scattered over the land to catch the unwary, who find too late that the snare has been skilfully set, and repentance, if it ever come, is of no avail.

And now such a lifting of masques! such a throwing off of disguises! We start back appalled at the sight. Who would recognize my Lord A——'s obsequious and ruddy lacquey in the keen-eyed, sharp-witted "brother," who had

left his character with his livery in the outside robing-room. Who would detect the meek, long suffering amanuensis and secretary to a master of royal blood, in the pale spiritual-faced devotee whose thin fingers are ever clutching an imaginary pen to inscribe some telling record of the real work to which he is vowed, gathered in the experience of the harder service to which he has subjected his body.

The threadbare tutor whose powers of patient endurance are attenuated to a hair is in the group, relieved of the weight, which though self-imposed, daily bows and crushes him as he carries it. He is telling to his sympathetic listeners, with sparkling eyes and in glowing words, the story of his success; how the seed planted with so much cost and pain in the young minds committed to him is bearing fruit, and questions are being solved more precious in their eternal

issues than the solutions of abstruse problems, or the perfect rendering of heathen literature, under the cover of which tuition the task is effectively done and a higher allegiance perfectly served. But how has *he* found entrance there, that bland and courteous man, whom we observe is like and yet unlike the companions sharing with him the hospitality of the strange feast?

Can we fail to identify the zealous incumbent of St. Geneviève in Sion Square? He does not seem quite at ease, although perfectly at home and as apt as any of the group in deciphering the unintelligible text of a dispatch, and is neither slow of speech nor dull of eye. There can be no mistake, however, for he is not even altered in garb or appearance, there being no need for him to discard the familiar vestment or "extreme" costume. His face is too well known to escape detection, even if he would. As one of the most

advanced ritualists perhaps of the day, incumbent of one of the most popular and fashionably attended churches of the Metropolis, he is easily recognized, and not to be confounded with those he so much resembles in the group.

Ritualism he has consistently taught and has made it attractive, but in his hands it has been the sugar coating of the pill of Roman sacerdotalism which thus administered, he thinks, will purge out the last dregs of a poisoning, corrupting Protestantism, which has hitherto resisted all efforts for its dislodgment.

The man represents the newest, boldest and most seductive of the schemes from the fertile bosom of Romish mercies; one that takes Mahomet to the mountain since the mountain will not come to Mahomet, well knowing that with the bulk of the world it is most easy to confound appearances with things, and proposes to help on the confusion of Ritualism and Roman-

ism, fondly believing that the latter will be more likely to be accepted than the former abandoned, if the dilemma be adroitly managed.

None better than this same incumbent of Sion Square has ever used the dispensation so rarely granted, and always with large guarantees, which elevate him to the rank and file of the Roman legion, while he is permitted to hold an honoured and legitimate position in the ministry of a heretical church.

And thus in his double character and twofold experience, he meets at certain times and seasons to recount his successes with a fervent satisfaction which shames the best efforts of the honest ministry he has sworn to convert. He dwells glowingly upon facts which even the most vigilant of archbishops and bishops, and the most jealous of statesmen have failed to suspect. He tells by name the numbers with whom in well-feigned sorrow he has

parted, as they crossed the narrow boundary to which he had skilfully carried them, handing them as it were from the extreme limits of a system, uncertain and contradictory in its teaching, to a well-defined faith and a sure position in a church which claims to be the same, "Yesterday, to-day and forever." He repeats, and without violating the sacredness of the confessional, the burden of manifold struggling souls who have sought him in that "sacramental" act, which his managing genius has established in the church of St. Geneviève. He hears little of the vulgar sins of falsehood, slander and covetousness, nor yet the grosser crimes of murder and robbery, treason and adultery. Heaven forbid! no such vile sinners are found in his choice flock. His finely tuned and sympathetic ear has been offended by no such tales of contrition. It is the low sweet murmur of a struggling conscience which

has made itself heard to him, seeking direction and knowledge, and not absolution for venial sin or hideous crime.

The young with their doubts, the feeble in their weakness, and the timid in their fear, have bowed before him with the same trembling petition, "Where shall I go to be saved?"

"Onward! onward! onward!" he commands, and they go forward, according to their characters and proclivities; some impelled by the unseen force supplied to their weakness and fear; others drawn by the attractions furnished as magnets to act upon the desires that had been created and nursed within them—until one and another they reach the point where they quit the hand that has guided them so far, and take that one irretrievable step which lands them in peace amid the flatteries and rejoicings that welcome them on the other side.

Surely with such services to report, and

such skill to reveal, this zealous ministrant is worthy of the pontifical blessing, which has been brought to him by commissioned hands, inscribed in golden characters upon the thrice blest amulet, hereafter to be pressed upon his heart. Nor is it only the stronger sex who throw aside their semblances and earth-stained coverings and devices in this "Cour des Miracles." High born matrons and maidens of noble birth have come forth from their impenetrable disguise, and talk in the almost blasphemous cant of their order, of a resemblance in their life of daily abnegation to Him whom they imitate in "assuming the form of a servant."

Thus in menial positions, discharging laborious and painful duties, frequently procured by proclaiming "salary no object," they obtain entrance into houses where they have it in their power to infect the atmosphere with the taint of the faith which they are sworn pre-eminently to

teach. In other associations, subordinate, abject, if need be, they are merely themselves gaining knowledge of which their Order has great need, and which can be turned to account.

Then as teachers and guardians of childhood and youth, they are sapping the strength, and blighting the growth of the parental creed, while the seeds of another are planted and watered, the sentiment and imagination are excited, the æsthetic needs are aroused and stimulated, and unsuspectingly they are led on step by step, until a miraculous conversion sends dismay to the suddenly awakened family, or the sensational journals noisily announce the "taking of the veil" by some accomplished heiress, who transfers her sterling from the custody of guardians to the control of a warden who will take good care that it is not squandered in baubles, or scattered in indiscriminate charities.

It will, probably, never be known in this life, what a valuable ally to the cause of propagandism is a thorough female devotee; and Reformed England would start back horror-stricken, could it be proved to what extent this mission of household invasion by maids, nurses and governesses of "superior qualifications" is stealing, like a miasmatic influence, into homes where Romanism is held in dread: and where even the advancing ritual of the day is not tolerated, because of a fancied resemblance to the offensive ceremonial. This is no light assertion. We know, moreover, from long residence in Catholic lands, to some extent, the important work assigned to women in these proselytising missions; they are ever the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the more accomplished actors in the work. Names could be mentioned of women in high positions, devoting themselves to this task of conversion, to

the exclusion of all other occupations. With the results, we are too sadly familiar, as we recall how, again and again, we have had to mourn the disappearance from our own church circles of familiar friends, through these successful raids upon our territory, accomplished by women. Acting under priestly direction, carrying now some bright young girl whose imagination has been kindled, and could hereafter only be kept glowing in a more seductive form of worship than was to be found at the altars of her own church. Then, a more brilliant triumph is achieved by the tireless missionary, as the sedate, matured woman falls a prey to the stealthy invader, a mother, in some cases, taking with her, perhaps, a little flock to be re-immersed in the baptismal waters, and taught to despise the regenerating rite, which had once made them "members of Christ, children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven," as they were

received into a pure and Apostolic Church. But we forbear to enlarge upon the picture which is not imaginary, and return to a glance at Lady di Spagna's receptions. These, as we have said, only took place in Cecile's absence.

4/ These evenings were Lady Ethel's compensation for many privations which she suffered in her separation from her fascinating life at Rook's Dene, and took the form, to her mind, of rewards for the maternal fidelity with which she escorted the young heretic to scenes in which she no longer found enjoyment, or ever felt herself at home.

The world, as far as it concerned itself at all with her doings, ascribed her unusual presence in town to a very natural desire to introduce her daughter to society, with a view to her settlement in life before the flush of youth and beauty had faded. Without desiring to do injustice to Lady Ethel, we must say there

were reasons to suspect other and more controlling motives. She was unquestionably an intelligent and willing instrument in the hands of those who were ready to direct her religious zeal, and make such use of her means and opportunities as should accomplish greater objects than the mere settlement of the recreant young lady, upon whose faith it was impossible to operate, and therefore quite as useless to hope that, directly or indirectly, her possessions could ever be devoted to the objects which her mother regarded as of primary importance.

Lady di Spagna had always possessed very marked histrionic gifts. In her youth, she carried the palm in private theatricals for skill and versatility of power in representation of character. In simulation she was perfect, and had always so delighted in mystery that, while we would suggest nothing unkind as to the real sorrow which shut her up at

Rook's Dene, it can be believed that she was not insensible to the charm of mystery which hung around her utter seclusion.

There were some to tell her among the very few she saw, that, in spite of her crape and weeds, she was an enigma to the people, and she was not unwilling to be so regarded. Even then her spiritual allegiance was not with the free and easy creed of the land of her birth. But her hand was not then strong enough for the play she designed, and she reserved it until she saw the card which would bring her success. In one thing in life she had entirely failed, and the conviction was exasperating, especially as she was forced to confess herself baffled in every attempt. That one supreme failure was her daughter's religious education.

That Cecile should become a *religieuse* she devoutly prayed, and indeed believed, when the meek and unresisting child was

left, in her tender years, in a convent in France. The mother had never read that pure young heart, or she would have seen there a cherished idol, the memory of a father who had been the divinity of her infant years, and to whom the sweet and gentle child had been a precious possession. It does so happen occasionally that a father's love with its wise and tender care, will outlive in a daughter's heart, the recollections of a mother's fondness and almost troublesome solicitude.

It was thus with Cecile, who was just old enough when she lost her father to have received impressions which would last as long as life, while she should ever be able to recall his wisdom and the truth of his counsels. She had, too, a very clear remembrance that the intercourse between her parents, especially respecting herself, was not always happy; and she recollected well the violence of religious discussions in which many bitter words

were said on both sides—her father's in defence of Protestantism, which her mother habitually attacked in withering language.

One incident, however, stood prominently defined in her memory with the vividness of yesterday. Not long before her father's death, he took her upon his knee, and after lavishing upon her every form of caress to which she was well accustomed, he said to her with a solemnity she never forgot.

“Cecile, darling, papa is going a very long journey, where he may not take his little girl, and he may never see her again, will she always remember her papa?”

With bitter sobs, the poor child promised never, never to forget her own dear papa.

“My little Cecile will soon be a great girl, and soon, indeed, will be a woman. Will she never forget that her dear papa was a Protestant, an English Protestant,

who loved the English Prayer Book only next his Bible."

"Cecile will never—never forget that her darling papa was an English Protestant," the little angel lisped, vaguely as her young mind could take in the length and breadth of the declaration.

"Now, my little daughter, papa has an English Prayer-Book which he has used so very many years, ever since he was himself a lad—since he was confirmed. It was in his hand when his little daughter was baptized; it has travelled with him half over the world, and he has used no other all these long years."

He drew from his pocket the much worn little book, in a fresh new case. He pointed out his own name, written by his mother's hand, dedicating his mother's gift, and just beneath he made her read her own. He did not tell her, that which was also there, for the sorrowful little heart could not have borne it then, "with

the love and prayer of her dying father, that God would keep the fatherless firm in the faith which that book taught, and that she should be His for ever, daily increasing in His Holy Spirit more and more until received into the everlasting kingdom."

From that hour, nothing but force, or treachery could have obtained the precious volume. In later years, she often declared that its gift had invoked a guardian angel to her side, who had never left her. Those fond eyes of the father not many days later were closed in death. The sadly bereaved little one, with unbecoming haste, was dispatched to a conventual school abroad, "in order that the heretical teachings she had received might be forgotten under more wholesome influences," said Lady Ethel to the rebuking conscience.

We have seen the failure of the hope upon which the cruel experiment was

hazarded, and have witnessed the maturing of a quiet but invincible resistance to maternal tuition in religious matters, while the father's prayer-book became the child's inseparable companion and constant guide, and seemed to possess a spell which kept the faith pure and undefiled in the simple heart.

Lady Ethel's kindness towards Protestantism would, perhaps, have been greater, but for the conditions of her husband's will, which put it quite out of her power to divert any thing beyond the income of her own settlements, and the life interest she had in certain properties. Everything at her death was bequeathed to the daughter, a handsome sum was left in trust for educational and other specified purposes, while Cecile, as soon as she reached her majority would have an independent provision; the only condition being that "she remained in the Protestant faith." Should she by any possibility

be perverted from that, the act of desertion would put her fortune at once under certain control.

Lady Ethel chafed at this, but there was no remedy; there was one inducement the less to tamper with her daughter's faith, but unfortunately it furnished an opportunity to taunt Cecile with the fear of losing her bribe if she changed her creed.

Her own settlements, however, were handsome, and the world would have smiled to learn that the seclusion of the widow at Rook's Dene arose from a desire to practice a rigid economy in order to accumulate ready means to enable her to carry out plans which she had long held in mysterious silence, but which startled alike the curious and indifferent, when her return to Rook's Dene with a foreign legion was but the prelude to an assertion of her creed in a most practical shape, in a place generally regarded as

one of the British strongholds of Protestantism.

With this long review, our patient reader will be prepared to better understand Lady di Spagna's character, and have a clearer insight of the transactions of which her house became a centre.

CHAPTER III.

A MASQUERADE PARTY UNMASKED.



THE season was practically over. There were still a few detained by various reasons in the sultry town, and even among the very *élite* there were still signs of life, for there are ever those who like to be the last upon the scene.

A select and highly elegant company was gathered for a final entertainment at one of the most gay and hospitable houses of fashion. It was to be a fancy ball,

and Cecile Fayne was expected to shine in some character suited to her beauty and bewitching grace.

She had long anticipated the pleasure of this evening, which was to be her last dissipation of the season; and when her preparations were completed, and her toilette underwent the usual scrutiny of her mother's critical eyes, she was pronounced perfect in appearance—even that cold mother's pride could not fail to be kindled at the exquisite loveliness of the fairy vision.

But M. di Spagna was her attendant that night, and a proud one too. As her mother hurried them off, after even having most unusually aided in the frivolous adornment of her daughter's person, there was something in her manner which did not escape Cecile's notice, and which was brought to her memory in a painful form, several hours later.

That evening too, there was an enter-

tainment such as we have already referred to, at Lady di Spagna's mansion, destined, also like the fancy ball to which she had hurried her daughter, to be the last of the season.

In the course of the evening we find ourselves in Lady di Spagna's elegant supper-room, where a not very large, but excessively select party surround a well-filled table, where the quality of the viands and the proprieties of the service atone in some degree for the privations that the self-sacrificing recipients suffer in their daily life, and in their accustomed disguise in apparel and occupation. Upon Lady Ethel's right hand is seated Monsignore Fabiani, whom we heard years ago in his eloquent office at Rook's Dene. At her left we see that incomparable actor, whom we have already introduced to our readers as the incumbent of St. Geneviève.

Having so well disposed of the two

places of honour, and paired the lady guests, the hostess with ready tact graciously begged her friends to seat themselves, as there could be no precedence in such a gathering.

There were also one or two others whom we have met before under different circumstances, who would not for the world have been gazetted as present in this their more fitting place. The conversation we have a right to know, and offer no excuse for repeating it.

“Dear Bishop,” murmured Lady di Spagna, as she daintily placed her jewelled hand upon the arm of the thoughtful Monsignore. “We are all longing to have a word of approbation from you. Our good work prospers, a small one has become a thousand.”

“Believe me, my enthusiastic devotee, that I fully appreciate your zeal; if my words are few, it is not because my heart is not filled with profound gratitude and

fervent admiration. I am prepared to give an address upon the opening of some schools next week, which will embody a report to encourage faithful souls and send dismay to the unbelieving heart of England."

Lady di Spagna smiled in her own bland way. "That is all very well, dear Bishop, but that is for everybody's ears and relates to work which every one may see. What does Monsignore think of the triumphs and trophies of the 'Secret Order of Sant' Agostino e Gesù?'"

Monsignore cleared his throat and coughed painfully. He was very discreet. His presence at the assembly that night was as great a surprise to himself as to all others, excepting Lady di Spagna.

"Unhappily, the multitude of my duties and incessant occupations restrain me from doing anything but surface and routine work in this great struggle of the day, but wherever I see hearty

endeavours to reclaim the wandering, I offer my blessing and my prayers."

"It seems to me, Monsignore, that the same 'unbelieving heart' of England is suffering from fatty degeneration," shouted the lacquey friar from the further end of the table, with a loud laugh, whose coarseness was a proof of his ability to play his menial part.

There was a faint attempt at a laugh from one or two others at the gross pleasantry, while Monsignore desirous to give a new direction to the conversation, exclaimed as he scanned the faces of the company,

"Why, I miss your step-son; where is Father Ambroise to-night, Lady di Spagna?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh! dear Bishop, he rarely comes to London or leaves Rook's Dene under any pretext. But you must know he is not a member of our Order; and while not of our

council, he is not in our counsel. He interprets his priestly duties in a very restricted sense. In fact, his faith is not aggressive nor proselytising. Dear good soul! he is a faithful pastor, but I wonder how he makes so many converts. Yet he is so good, the very salt of the earth. He does very well, too, at his post."

"He certainly ranks among our most successful teachers," added Monsignore, "and though very quiet, he is assuredly very gifted."

"Oh I dare say," replied the lady, "but he is so very cold and unimpassioned. He inherits more of the indifferent plodding English character of his mother's nation than the fiery zeal of his father's race." Then quickly turning with her sweetest smile to the shining light, only second in lustre of the group. "Surely, our zealous incumbent from Sion Square well replaces our son, and he has some stirring stories to tell you, Monsignore. Is it

indiscreet now to ask if many more sheep have been led from the wilderness into the true safe fold?"

The incumbent's face brightened with genuine satisfaction. He repeated for the Bishop's benefit the oft-told story of unsatisfied hearts, whose spiritual longings, having been stimulated and but feebly answered at home, had been forced to go further and seek what was not permitted in their own fold, until they were safely housed where they would stray no more.

He glowed with enthusiasm as he recounted the evidences of increasing interest in vital truths, under the gradual training and high-strung education of his system. He asserted with gratified confidence the unanimity of his flock, thus led step by step, no dissentient voice reaching his ear as he marched on, boldly claiming for his device the equivocal words "the Catholic truth of England's Church." Sacraments, too, were multi-

plied, and without protest; their original simplicity being gradually lost in a new and diversified ceremonial, which no one hinted was not to be found in the Book of Common Prayer.

Confession had become morally necessary, and priestly absolution a *sine quâ non* for greater privileges, yet no demands were heard for the warrant for such practice. Prayers for the dead had little by little become ingrafted upon public worship by timidly teaching at first that justification for the custom can be found in one or more existing petitions, skilfully punctuated. Add to this the pious reflection that no harm, even if no good, could be derived from the habit, which seemed to give further encouragement, and eventually led to the permanent adoption of the usage. As for externals, long ago the battle had been fought and won, the contested ground having been gained inch by inch, until the most gorgeous cere-

monial out of the recognized Roman Church was to be found in Sion Square, with music of the highest order, cross and candle, incense and *bénitier*, solemn processions within and without the church, prolonged litanies before shrine and station, with here and there the closely curtained confessional box, near which devout and kneeling groups were ever seen, gathered in side aisles and lateral chapels.

A momentary hush fell upon the company as the enthusiastic story was eloquently told, and many eyes sparkled; while even Monsignore warmed with sympathy and growing interest.

But there was one face upon which there was no glow of satisfaction. It was that of a middle-aged man of thoughtful expression upon a countenance which had once been noble and commanding. His days were spent in the drudgery of teaching, not always such inspiring things

as religion and ritualism. His lowering brow did not escape Lady di Spagna's quick eye.

"Our good brother Ryan," she remarked aloud, "does not seem affected with the general enthusiasm. Will he explain why he appears so little pleased with such heart-stirring detail of our cherished work?"

The reply came in a voice which seemed to be invoked from sepulchral depths.

"*Cui Bono?*" he asked with compressed lips. "What is gained? To what is all this leading? To Catholic Truth? I answer, no! These silly people have not the faith, despite the pretty good imitation which beguiles them. What is worse, they are so contented where they are, and get so much comfort out of these gorgeous rites and ceremonies just described, that they are very unlikely, in any important numbers ever to get any further, in spite of their pastor's per-

suasive guidance to the frontier line. Now let us look closely at things as they are. The rendezvous at Sion Square cannot at the very utmost, and with great pressure accommodate more than two thousand persons, and I fancy there are rarely more than fifteen hundred there, except on extraordinary occasions. We will admit an average congregation of about seventeen hundred and fifty. This congregation changes, and there is always a greater or lesser amount of floating material. But to be generous in our calculations, we will suppose that two thousand different persons come annually under direct ministrations. Am I not right?" appealing to St. Geneviève's earnest pastor.

"I only regard those who confess as directly under my care, and my especial parishioners; I heard last year a trifle less than one thousand confessions. I give about twenty, occasionally twenty-five

absolutions every week. It is presumable that no person confesses twice in one week, and there are many with whom it is but a monthly sacrament."

"Very well, that makes matters worse. You said I think there were fifty-six went to Catholicism, pure and undefiled, last year out of St. Geneviève. That is a fraction more than one soul saved per week, by all that stupendous machinery which might support three honest Catholic churches. This percentage of conversions strikes me as lamentably small and fully set off by what I know of actual losses. In this metropolis there are earnest, untiring men, whose sole mission is to save unhappy souls from popery,—that is their shibboleth and war-cry. At a recent meeting they found cause for lament over the report of their missionary at large, inasmuch as it gave evidence of a diminution in the number of last year's converts, compared with that of previous years.

Something more than sixteen hundred had been rescued by their labours, and you may depend upon the authenticity of that report. There was no deception in the statement, as there was no occasion for exaggeration, and no motive for making any false declarations. I marked every word of the discussion with painful interest. I was there as representing my noble patron; the meeting was strictly private, of the managers only, and no one dreamed that a wretched papist was there in disguise taking ample notes. Moreover, this association represents a very small portion of the machinery actually employed in this service, which is both offensive and defensive. It seeks, on the defensive side, to guard and preserve in their own so-called Evangelical faith a large and important element, which might be enfolded in our own bosom if we had wisdom and strength to appropriate it. Meanwhile, how are we meeting the

offensive policy of these associations? Are not our young men and young women drawn into 'Christian' associations, Masonic societies, Co-operative leagues, whose actual basis is infidelity, and whose practical fruits are shown in deadly hostility to Truth, in rebellion even against civil authority, and in wide-spread scepticism. Our own uncared for children, the young and impressionable little ones are gathered by these zealots into ragged schools where they are clothed and fed, warmed and cheered, have the Bible put in their feeble hands and interpreted in the light of a soul-destroying schism; they are furnished with flippant arguments, and finally are brought to declare in the fashion of the day, that the one earthly Head of the Church is Anti-Christ, that 'the faith once delivered to the saints' is no more truth than a nursery fable or fairy tale."

"Alas!" rejoined the late enthusiast,

rather crushed and not enjoying the public rebuff. "I can only say I do my best, and we have all been satisfied with results up to this moment. What remedy does my critical brother suggest? Would he bid me abandon my present field of labour so unfruitful, according to his views, and devote my time and talents to those 'uncared for infants?' Is there anything I leave undone in my more appropriate place?"

"No, indeed! if my counsel is sincerely asked," replied Ryan. "Rather let me say that too much has been done already, not only in Sion Square, but where others are working like yourself," and he glanced at two faces not unknown to our readers. "The work is fatally overdone. The appetite to which you minister is fed at home; æsthetic desires need not wander outside of the ample provision there made for them, to be thoroughly satisfied. Oh! my fellow workers, will you heed an hum-

ble monitor who tells you that we shall never be masters here! Our numbers are not increasing, for our vital power is on the decline. We have not the people with us. The masses are on the other side. It is very well to capture a marquis here, and a fresh young lord there; an honourable lady on this side, and a princely heiress on that. The social influence gained is something, it is true, and the material acquisition certainly not to be despised. But for all that, our strength is absolutely diminished in England, and our power grows yearly less. My position in my Lord A——'s family gives me rare opportunities for instructive observations, and they are jotted down, I can assure you, without exciting suspicion. No one dreams that the fagged and pre-occupied teacher has a thought beyond the perfect recitation of the multiplication table or the grand divisions of the globe. You all know well enough that the air of

that home is Protestant to a rarified degree, very trying to Catholic lungs. You will not suspect any welcome to ritualism there, and some of you, at any rate, are familiar with the sympathies of the people who meet at that house. Happily for us there is a kindliness of spirit which gives the threadbare tutor many social privileges, conferring a certain freedom of movement and a measure of confidence among these chosen spirits of the land. It is thus I become possessed of information which fully justifies my giving the solemn warning, telling you that the Church of England is thoroughly aroused. By one sense and another the enemy has been detected at the gate, within the very pale mingling with the faithful, assuming the uniform, and armed with the watchword of Truth itself.

“Again, it was, until quite lately, the practice of those who did not feel thoroughly satisfied with the cold worship of

this land, quietly to turn from the meaningless and squalid rites, toward the warm and glowing altars of the Catholic Church, seeking a comforting refuge there. But all this is passing away too rapidly. It is now the fashion to 'bring up' the services, ritual and adornments generally of their own worship, until it reaches a point which satisfies the most fastidious, and furnishes upon every side our most successful and most dangerous enemy; not, as some fondly believe, our helpful ally. Meanwhile, there is a growing repugnance, even a scoffing contempt for what is insolently called 'Romanism.' This is spreading through all classes of society and churchmanship, and is a foe, determined and formidable, because intelligent and instructed; it is no longer the vulgar cry of 'no popery' defeating itself by violence. With this despising of our Church as it is, has come an avowed determination to revert to days which

these critical explorers are pleased to call the 'purer age of the Church.' To sustain such resolves they are digging up traditions, reviving doctrines, and adopting usages made obsolete by long disuse in our worship, and forgotten in our religious legends. In fact, to hear some of these self-constituted theologians reason, you would say they believed the Church generally to be quite a modern institution. Believe me, my friends, I have come to understand the voice of the country, the enlightened country. It is only the timid, half-instructed, Evangelical extreme of English Churchmen who shrink from these ultra views because they resemble Romanism, or may eventually lead to popery. Look no further than the language adopted in ordinary religious newspapers, language, which not so very long ago would have brought down the severest Episcopal censure."

He drew from his pocket a small printed

sheet commonly regarded as the organ of the advancing party, and read,

“ ‘Wanted, a Catholic priest as *locum tenens*, &c.’

“ ‘To Catholics, a lady desires a cook.’

“ ‘A Catholic housemaid desires a situation.’

“ All classes you will perceive, the mistress and maid have been well instructed. Then, again, among publications advertised, ‘The Catholic Pulpit,’ ‘The Priesthood,’ ‘The Altar,’ and ‘The Sacrifice.’

“ Next, I will point out something quite new for British Protestants. Among editorial notices attention is called to,

“ ‘A retreat for laymen which will be held, &c.’

“ ‘A retreat for clergy will be held, &c.’

“ Here is something still more startling.

“ ‘The Viaticum case, a vessel in which *It* can be reserved for the sick in Convents

and Collegiate Chapels, or in which *It* can be carried from the house of one sick person to another. Sanctioned by the late Archbishop Longley, &c., &c.'

"I fear to weary you with the long list; but if you can bear patiently with me I will point out two or three more examples of 'choice selection of eucharistic vestments,' 'altar furniture,' 'pure wax tapers,' 'incense,' 'crucifixes,' 'unleavened bread,' and last though not least some 'sermons by Ignatius, O.S.B., Monk of the Church of England,' with the fifteenth thousandth of the 'English Catholics' Vade Mecum,' with its table of contents, to which any of us would unhesitatingly subscribe. This book is within the reach of any one, being sold for one shilling. Many may think all this very encouraging. I do not. A greater reformation than Luther's is going on this day in England, for it is the Reformation of Luther's Protestantism. But it is not

going to carry strength to the Vatican. We are not going to regain England. It is safe now to predict that this Empire will never again be subject to the Holy See, nor accept any dogma which may come from Rome. We have repeated in our experience, the overwhelming moral of the German legend. We have tossed our bucketsful in wrathful despair, and have invoked the rushing torrent which will carry us where we know not, but inevitably to our destruction. There is a very clever French book just issued, in which some enthusiasts are sent off in a projectile to the moon where they confidently expected to land. Not knowing, or not counting upon, certain material disturbances, their calculations were deranged, and the lunar attractions combined with other forces, carried them *around* the satellite without touching it. Finally, after agonizing revolutions in space and darkness, with occasional glimpses of

the world they had travelled so far to conquer to science, repulsion prevailed, and they found themselves on the homeward track again, returning swiftly to the terrestrial sphere they had left with sanguine hope of great achievements. It is thus, I believe, we have undershot or overshot our mark. We have helped in the business of this so-called revival of Catholic practice in England. We have lent our strength to those who have made it their own.

“This astounding growth of ritualism is death to our designs. It simply registers the high water mark of its own system and its own capabilities. It will take time for the movement to spread, and lift the whole Church to its own height. But that it is spreading, manifestly in some quarters, imperceptibly in others; that no class or section of the English Church is not in a greater or less degree influenced by it, no one can doubt who

uses his eyes. We have only to notice such things as I have called your attention to, now quietly accepted, even looked upon as inoffensive, which twenty, nay ten years ago were as much decried on the ground of popery as are now some of the most extreme ritualistic practices. In proportion as these latter things are found free from the popish spirit, (and mark you, that is the test), they too, in their turn, will grow into favour;—and we are meanwhile gaining nothing. Our brother of St. Geneviève must show a very much larger and growing record of conversions before his work will prove to be that for which it is conceived, a nursery for true Catholicism.”

He could be made to say no more, nor was he in the least influenced by the weight of arguments which would have given to these significant indications altogether a more hopeful aspect.

How strange it is that different minds

should work upon precisely the same data to such opposite conclusions. While the familiar facts quoted by Ryan were to him but intimations of failure filling him with hopelessness, there were others able to glean comfort from them and build great results upon the shadowy foundation. There was no attempt to conceal the unpopularity of Ryan's sentiments, and a very decided expression of disapproval was heard on all sides.

The conversion of heretical royalty, of heads of noble and ancient houses, was recalled to the memory of the incredulous doubter, while he was asked to consider the increasing number of adherents to the Pope, the vast material offerings yearly carried to Rome—but without avail; he could not be moved from his position. He had relapsed into his habitual thoughtfulness, and was doing an imaginary sum in the rule of three, to determine if so many receded in one year, how many

years it would take before the cause should be quite swallowed up in the revived and stirring Catholicism of the Church of England.

Yet in the face of all, his gloomy prophecies based upon his convictions of the fruitlessness of the task he had to perform, he showed no disposition to retire from the field, and did not retreat as the order was given to work on. In his position he enjoyed rare facilities for studying the popular mind in the abundant information which reached his ears, and in his easy access to documentary sources for learning the growth and decline of parties, religious and political. These advantages he was in no wise ready to abandon. But an east wind, as it were, had blown over the assembly, and the general enthusiasm was greatly chilled. The ritualistic incumbent could not but secretly acknowledge the truth of the charge that had been made; for he knew well

enough that among his infatuated parishioners the majority evinced nothing but the most supreme desire to remain where they were, in the enjoyment of the beauty and fulness of a service professedly wrought out of their own prayer-book and its creeds, rather than to break through the fascinating illusion and quit openly the church of their land and fathers, to seek a home in another communion.

Monsignore felt no satisfaction as he recalled the fate which generally awaits false prophets, and remembered with an uncomfortable sinking of heart the confident predictions he had glowingly uttered at Rook's Dene years ago, and habitually repeated with equal assurance upon all similar occasions.

In vain, too, Lady di Spagna detailed her projects of charity for starving souls, and enumerated the conquests she had achieved. Other ladies told stammeringly

the hopeful fruits of their mission in nursery, schoolroom, or boudoir.

Lady di Spagna then in desperate play risked her last card, by calling attention to a "brother" not far from her, and in her very sweetest tones said to him,

"How is it that our gifted brother from Daneshurst is so voiceless to-night? Will he not tell us something of Ritualism outside of the metropolis? Can he offer no antidote to the lethargic dose which another eloquent brother has administered to us all?"

"I am here, my lady, to learn, not to teach. I am among you to take notes, not to make reports," he replied quietly.

"But surely you will tell us whether Ritualism is strengthening or weakening our cause in your awakened neighbourhood," asked the lately discomfited incumbent of St. Geneviève.

"I am in no position to judge," he replied in undisturbed calm. "I have no-

thing to do with results, these you will learn from Father Ambroise, or more accurately, perhaps, from the Friar of Foligno."

"Are you in a position," asked Lady di Spagna, ironically, "to throw any light upon the probabilities of our standard ever waving over Daneshurst Castle?"

"I am not favoured, Lady di Spagna, with the religious confidence of my lord-baron. I have no reason to believe him softening towards a cause which he has fought hard all his life," he replied coldly.

Lady Ethel thus foiled, retreated, and matters took a business turn, and every one seemed relieved. No one regretted when the last report was read, and the financial exhibit was over. Servants entered immediately afterward with wine and substantials. The wearied counselors refreshed themselves; conversation relaxed and took even a frivolous tone.

"Tell me, Lady di Spagna," said Mon-

signore, sipping appreciatingly the costly wine, "how does Miss Fayne bear her worldly diversions? Is she well? Has she secured any prospects likely to please you?"

The mother flushed at her name, and Monsignore inwardly bemoaned his evident blunder.

"Cecile is well. She is always well, thank you. But she is more hopelessly bigoted than ever. She is not likely to secure any prospects to please me. She has refused young Howard L'Estrange, knowing how much I desired the match, just because he is a Catholic. She told me, indeed with the greatest effrontery, that nothing on earth would tempt her to marry a Papist. She has turned away from another very desirable *parti*, because the young aspirant was too High Church, whatever that may mean, and I am expecting nothing else than that she will ask my consent to her marriage with

semi-plebeian Harewood, who pursues her everywhere, and to whom she is especially gracious. I can never forgive him for being the son of a man who was such a deadly foe to our Church and Truth generally."

"Oh! if that were the only objection to young Harewood," said one of the guests, "it would be rather cruel to withhold your favour. But if rumour be true, he is addicted to pleasures which make the money go, and would scarcely be the man your ladyship would choose."

"The choice in no wise rests with me, thanks to her father's infamous will, and as for her money——"

The sentence was never completed, for at that moment the attention of the hostess was directed to a considerable stir outside, and in the next instant the young lady in question, not expected at home for two hours at least, abruptly entered the council-chamber.

For a second or two she was naturally abashed, and considerably astonished at the company she beheld, supposing she should find her mother with a few friends at their quiet supper.

Approaching her mother, she exclaimed with suppressed emotion,

“Oh, mamma, I have such dreadful news! I could not even wait for M. di Spagna—for papa, to return. I must go at once to Daneshurst. Poor Milicent! Dear little May!”

Quite forgetful of the incongruities of her dress, in her agitation she threw off the light mantle which covered her, and stood a picture of fairyland in a robe of silver and gossamer. She was recalled to a sense of propriety by her mother's sarcastic question, if she would go to Daneshurst in ball-dress and diamonds.

At the same instant her eye fell upon a familiar face, and without answering her mother's timely question, or pausing to

ask what brought the gentleman there, nor yet perceiving that his countenance had changed a dozen times in as many seconds, she turned persuasively to him,

“Oh, Mr. Basil-Leigh, I had no idea you were here. Did Milicent send you for me? Shall we not start at once?”

Her mother's question was repeated with admonitory look.

“Oh, no! mamma, not in this wretched stuff. It will not take me ten minutes to change it all. Indeed, Mr. Basil-Leigh, I will be quite, quite ready for the midnight train.” Her pleading eyes and pathetic voice might have prevailed with the wondering Basil-Leigh, but for her mother's peremptory command,

“Go to your room, Cecile, and reflect, if there be any sense of decorum in your nature, upon the very indelicate position in which you have placed yourself before these gentlemen. It is very well for us all that Mr. Basil-Leigh is more sensible

than yourself of the impropriety of your request."

"Pardon me, Lady di Spagna, you are too severe. I am sure that Miss Fayne must have had some very urgent appeal from—from her cousins, and I beg——"

His petition was lost, for already Lady di Spagna had left the room leading the agitated Cecile.

"How indiscreet you are, Cecile! Mr. Basil-Leigh evidently knows nothing of the event at Daneshurst. He dropped in here quite by chance this evening, and surprised one of my meetings of *bienfaisance*. I have been waiting for an opportunity to give him an intimation. But under no circumstances must you travel with a gentleman at midnight—accompanied even by your maid it would provoke a scandal."

"But, mamma, you have not long known the sad story?" asked Cecile.

"Oh, I heard it this morning only," answered the lady, indifferently.

“Mamma, you knew this morning that my guardian was dead! That Milicent needed me, and was all but alone in her sorrow. And you helped to deck me out in these vanities and allowed me to go to a ball, where my presence provoked the severest strictures, and where I first learned what every one else knew this morning. Oh, mamma, it was too cruel! My comfort for Milicent was that Mr. Basil-Leigh was at home to support and console her, and I find him here at your charitable levée, as much in ignorance as myself.”

“What nonsense you utter, Cecile. I thought to find a little gratitude for having spared you a disappointment, and if meddling tongues criticised your presence after you declared your ignorance, they might have been better employed. It was very bad taste in anyone to tell you disagreeable things at a dance.”

“Do I love dancing and balls so much,

mamma, that I could find pleasure in stealing to them when my good kind god-father, my only kinsman, lay cold and dead, and my poor cousin, my dearest friend was left alone in her bereavement? Mamma, please do not restrain me. Come with me yourself to Daneshurst. I will bless you forever, if for this once you will indulge me."

"Do be reasonable, you silly child. You would find your cousins fast asleep if you started now. After the disturbance of last night, the household would be in no mood to unbar and open to any intruder at the unseemly hour you would reach the place. Go to bed now, so to be prepared to take an early start. One of the servants can go with you, and then you will be with your cousin as early as she will be prepared to receive you. Go to bed now, and allow me to return to my neglected guests. I will make matters clear to Mr. Basil-Leigh, if he has been

able to await my return ; now good-night, and pray don't be flying downstairs again this evening."

Cecile turned sadly to her room, prepared to obey. She little suspected the cogent reasons that had kept her mother's lips sealed as to the contents of a heavy black-edged bulletin which had reached her early in the day, while Cecile was engrossed in preparation for an entertainment which she had been anticipating a long time. There, the mother hoped, she would find herself enthralled until the small hours of the morning ; in fact she did not care much what happened if Cecile once got securely out of the house, and did not dream of a contretemps like that which had occurred ; for she had impressed upon M. di Spagna that the carriage could not come for them before two o'clock. This gentleman generally paid great respect to his wife's instructions, and was quite aware of the expected re-union, al-

though Lady Ethel had not dared to confide to him the contents of the despatches she had received; for M. di Spagna had a good deal of chivalry, especially when his fair step-daughter was concerned.

That evening Lady Ethel had counted upon her own most *recherché* gathering of the season, the only evening at Monsignore's disposal, and this he had consented to consecrate entirely to her wishes. His appearance the lady hoped to turn to good account. Postponement was impossible. It took but an instant's consideration to decide her when she had fully mastered the contents of two notes, one from Daneshurst, and the other from her step-son. She crumpled up the unwelcome pages, and tore them in shreds with the determination to risk Cecile's learning the gloomy tidings before night, while she would postpone the announcement to those other friends who knew anything of the Baron, until her own reception was over

and Cecile returned from the evening's frivolity.

While Cecile was in the midst of a merry group, she was approached by M. di Spagna, asking her to excuse him for a short time, that he would like to "look in" upon his club, hoping to find a particular friend in whom he was in quest. He committed her in the interval to the chaperonage of Mrs. Harewood, one of the few, whom Cecile remembered as an intimate family friend and neighbour in her own father's lifetime.

Mrs. Harewood was a widow with two daughters rather younger than Cecile, and an only son, some five years older, upon whose heart our fair young friend was supposed to have made a favourable impression. It was therefore quite natural that M. di Spagna should commit his daughter to her protection. He had not long been at the soirée when he was accosted by friends, who, one after another

inquired incidentally for particulars of the death of the Baron of Daneshurst. His start of surprise proved that his avowed ignorance of the Baron's death was not assumed. But he was uneasy, yet did not care to mention the matter to Cecile until he had some certain knowledge, while his own delicate sense of propriety suggested at once the unsuitableness of Cecile's continued presence in the gay scene if her kinsman were really dead. He sought her therefore with the request we have mentioned, and went to his club, where he learned that the Baron had died the night before. Particulars had been in town all day, but had arrived too late for notice in the morning papers.

Shortly after M. di Spagna's departure, Cecile observed young Harewood approach his mother, telling her something, which made that lady start and turn quickly toward herself, shaking her head incredulously. Cecile was at the moment

conversing with a gentleman whom she found very entertaining, and who had kept her in a livelier mood than usual, which perhaps led her to fancy something rebuking in the Harewoods' manner and glances at her. This gave so sudden a depression to her spirits that her partner observed her change of countenance and inquired if she felt ill, the room being very warm. She was glad, therefore, at the same moment that the dance was over to see young Harewood approach, as she supposed to claim her for the coming quadrille, he standing next on her list. He did not lead her however to the room where the dancers were gathering, but to his mother, who kindly made her take a seat beside her, the son standing directly before her, as if to shield her from general observation, while the mother asked in a low voice.

“Cecile, dear, have you any news from Daneshurst lately?”

“Not for several days. My cousin last wrote in particularly good spirits of her father, who seemed improving, contrary to everyone’s expectation. But why do you ask?”

“Because I did not think you could have heard the news which is in town this evening. The latest intelligence from Daneshurst, my child, is of such a character that it is very improper for you to be here gay and dancing to-night.”

Cecile clasped her hands and gazed in mute inquiry.

“You ought to have learned hours ago what many in London knew this morning. The Baron died last night, and you are reported in an evening paper to be now at Daneshurst consoling your afflicted cousin. It is passing strange that no despatch was sent to Lady di Spagna or yourself. Had we not better await M. di Spagna’s return in some less frequented room. Our hostess will permit us to retire to some

more private place; or, better still, I will take you directly home, and send the carriage back for Gerald and his sisters."

"Oh! will you take me home? Let us go at once. My poor Milicent! My dear, kind godfather dead, and I in this mocking scene. Dear Mrs. Harewood, I am so sorry to carry you away, yet I cannot dream of waiting here. To think of my dancing while Milicent's heart is aching!"

They quickly left, and we have seen Cecile's unexpected entrance at another feast, to which she was welcomed by neither her mother nor the motley group of guests.

Mrs. Harewood but lingered a moment in her carriage while her footman inquired if there were any later news. But Lady di Spagna's wondering servants had not learned there were any tidings which could interest or distress.

Lady Ethel, after a parting fling at Cecile's sudden demonstration of affection


for the "drivelling old dotard," returned in no serene frame of mind to the disordered group below. Monsignore stood in resigned patience waiting to say good-night to the much vexed hostess. One after another followed suit until Basil-Leigh and "a sympathizing friend" were ready to hear that the venerable obstructionist of the Norman stronghold had gone where he would trouble the little coterie no more with his "bulwark of the Reformation," and that the gifted and variously endowed Milicent de Leycour was in her own right and title, Baroness of Daneshurst, patroness of manifold livings, and dispenser of charities which had hitherto gone only in the extreme Evangelical direction.

It might be that better days were coming in one quarter, at least, for the cause which had been rather talked down in the agitation of the evening, and with this oft repeated wish, and a discussion upon

matters not yet ready for publication, Mr. Basil-Leigh and his friend withdrew from the house, just as the belated M. di Spagna drove to the door, the prey of conflicting feelings, not the least painful of which was the anticipation of the domestic storm that awaited him, for a neglect of paternal duties, which had brought such a lamentable contretemps to foil the success of the evening.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST OF THE BARONS OF DANESHURST.

HE months which had brought so many fresh pleasures and new joys to Cecile Fayne, had been burdened with care, and were seasons of great anxiety to Lady Milicent. They were not, however, without their redeeming hours, and many a bright oasis lay in her path across the desert waste, which she was slowly travelling, heavy laden and weary-hearted.

The brightest and greenest of all these

desert isles, was St. Alphege, which day by day was realizing the hopes of her heart and the welfare of the people, whose wants had inspired this munificent work of love. She had voluntarily taken a position of perfect unobtrusiveness in the parish, doing such good work as was directed by the judicious priest to whom the spiritual interests of the flock had been committed.

Another bright spot in life, and destined hereafter to be regarded as a compensation for years of unacknowledged sacrifice, was her father's softening character, his undisguised faith in herself, and his recognition, in his own fashion it is true, of her unselfish devotion to him, and the beautiful unworldly life she led.

As the long and unusually cold and stormy winter drew to a close, and the sweet harbingers of spring appeared in vale and grove, a great improvement seemed to be marked in his health. He

grew less dependent upon others, and would spend much time in the grounds, when the sun shone or the air was balmy, and occasionally would voluntarily suggest a drive with his children. But it was only to Milicent's heart that the crowning joy was revealed, as each day softened his spirit toward holy things. Comforted by her very earnest assurance that she would never, and could never become a Romanist; that she found truth in sources which had never been polluted and were pure when the bishops of Rome first assumed the title of Pontiff and built their throne of unrighteous rule in Christ's church upon forgery and violence. She tried to convince him that her nature needed something more of the reverent form, richness of beauty and fervour of expression than the Church of England had offered or encouraged since the Reformation, that there were thousands cherishing the same desire, that it belonged of

right to the future of their ritual, and that with many others she only craved some privileges and devotional helps which had been lying unused and unthought of for centuries, to the great decay of the church's life.

He could never sympathize with such longings, but ceased to discuss the subject, declaring that the Church of England had been all-sufficient to keep him right, as it had done for his fathers before him, and he could not comprehend why it should lose its power over his children, and be found so inadequate to the wants of the rising generation generally. His daughter had learned the wisdom of receiving this threadbare reply in silence. Occasionally she would retort amiably in the equally stereotyped defence, that times were no longer the same, that this was a restless and inquiring age, that there had come a revival in all things; new conditions had opened new views, and with

this new view of religious truth, came wants and necessities in religious worship very unlike those of his own early days. She did not quite fail to make him see to some extent, that which seemed to her to describe and explain such a revival. She had thought deeply and sincerely upon the subject, analyzing her own feelings with the aim to find the basis of truth for such wants in worship as she discovered in herself and others; not willing to encourage in herself or promote in others a vague and unhealthy sentiment that should replace instead of nourishing true religion in the heart.

Conversation with Basil-Leigh helped her to do this and to separate from her feelings every element of superstition or taint of materialism. She slowly seized, and more exactly and clearly than her spiritual director, perhaps, appreciated, the pure form in which the Church has given to her truthful doctrine and wor-

ship, the sacramental character, with which we instinctively, not to say necessarily, invest all truth, in order to receive and teach it effectively; that character under which our nature in its rudest condition seizes truth, and which in its higher education it learns intelligently to embody without endangering it. What is to the savage a necessity, and therefore an idolatry is in us a subjection of the material. We enshrine truth in visible symbols to spiritualize them, and not to materialize the truth; not to the injury but to the increase of its invisible and spiritual power. In giving to it outward sign we do not change its form or degrade its nature, but give it freer intercourse, larger grasp of our nature through the senses, the imagination, the emotions. Art is thus but the outward imagery of truth, and the more faithfully the idea is represented, the more perfect the art. Nature is thus sacramental of the truth of God;

and the more perfectly we understand the laws and resources of nature, the uses of things, their mutual relations of dependence, their separate and joint offices of the parts and agents of the great economy, the more perfectly do they each and all become sacramental of the power, wisdom, love and providence of God, as our Lord exemplified in the sacramental teaching of His parables. Thus every object of the inanimate world becomes to the reflective mind, the sign of a truth, the visible part of it.

Thus, with such apprehensions exalted and purified by the spirit of religion, Lady Milicent was able to see the just limits of the sacramental use which spiritual truth may make of visible things for the furtherance of a true devotion; and she was hindered by no more fear of transubstantiating any precious verity of the Church's faith in the enrichment of its worship, than of materializing the great

central truth of all, and she would have as little thought of mistaking the sign, however beautiful and true, for the precious spiritual fact it represented, as of corporealizing in the elements of the eucharistic feast, the One infinitely holy offering made once for all upon Calvary.

This truth in relation to religious ceremonial will never be rightly judged so long as a sensitive spirit of fear and suspicion assumes the Church to be in the same conditions of danger, with the same needs of repression, and with as few safeguards against a relapse into Roman error as at the period of the Reformation.

We are far from a desire to undervalue the wisdom and care of the reforming fathers of the Church; but it is in the spirit as much as in the letter of that great work that we are to seize, strengthen and perpetuate it. To claim that the great fundamental principles of Protes-

tant truth thus laid down to recall the Church to its scriptural basis, are too rigid and unyielding to receive the spirit, answer to the wants, and satisfy the necessities of an ever-developing nature under an expanding civilization, is to set them above Holy Scripture itself. Our preachers tell us that the written word of God not only fits all time and all human circumstances, but that its divine character and origin find an ever strengthened attestation, in this daily enlarging trial of its worth and sufficiency. If God can trust His truth to its own vindication, and gather increasing honour for it in the world, surely we must not think so little of the Fathers of the Reformation as to suppose they designed to cast the true worship of the Church in a rigid mould; that it is not to be trusted to the use of a loyal liberty, incapable of conforming to the changed and ever changing conditions of the future life of the Church,

of adjusting its instrumentalities to the varying necessities of human society.

These supposed restraints upon liberty in things not of principle, but of observance, taste and feeling, tend to fossilize the theory of the Reformation, and bring disrespect upon the glorious work which was designed to be the beginning of a purified, healthy and progressive life of the Church; the severe outline of a building destined to rise in breadth, richness and beauty, as successive generations should strengthen and adorn it; the foundations being ever the same, sure and immovable. To suffer a perpetual dread of Romanism to cramp and cripple the liberties of the Church, is only to invoke in another form the tyrannical dominion our fathers threw off, starve and dwarf the life they designed should grow, expand and embrace every power, while it fed every want of our nature.

Thoughts like these were interchanged

between father and daughter in those sweeter moments of intercourse which marked the latter days of the Baron's life. He, it is true, always claiming a high spiritual standard, with greater religious zeal, as the means which should redeem the land and people from the slough of infidelity and godlessness of life, to which they were tending under the specious names of Broad Churchism and Liberalism, both fatal synonymes of a soul-destroying unbelief.

While granting the truth of all this, the keenly observant daughter could but reply in a tone anticipating in time only the utterance of the facts, then nearly as evident as now, which have been lately expressed by a disheartened spokesman of the Evangelical mind,* whose opportuni-

* " We repeat it, the difficulties of finding among the Evangelical party men of the right stamp now a days are *immense*, a fact of which those who are charged with the duty of selecting a successor to the excellent Rector

ties for gaining exact knowledge, no one in his own party seems disposed to question. All agree in mourning over the necessity of confessing that after thirty years indefatigable labour, the Evangelical party has reached a point beyond which it cannot carry the people, while they were forced to see the abhorred Ritualists press

of Bath, out of a hundred or more applications, will, by this time have become painfully aware, We assume, of course, that there is a genuine piety and a hearty desire to save souls; for where these conditions are lacking, it is wholly unnecessary to investigate further. But, among the many—and we fully believe that the proportion of such was never larger than it is—who possess these indispensable gifts, circumstances may co-exist which greatly detract from a clergyman's fitness for a particular post. His education may have been too confined, he may be a man of no parts, or his *physique* may be weak, and therefore however excellent in other respects, it would be a grievous mistake to place him where he would be called upon to address an erudite congregation, or to minister in a large church. A Ritualist labouring under similar disadvantages is able to fall back upon his ornate services, his chanting, his vestments, and his processions; but the Evangelical has no such forces in

on before them, carrying all ranks and kinds, and thus "their hearts had well-nigh failed them under hope deferred."*

But more potent than discussion, and more resistless than argument was the practical illustration of Lady Milicent's faith in her unwearying life of countless sacrifices, with its daily and hourly adaptation and submission to a will which she

reserve, and unless he can "preach the word and power" he must in one sense be pronounced a failure. Then again he is often poor, and entirely ignorant of the ways of the world (we use the term in a merely conventional sense), so that he will often unwillingly offend the feelings or the prejudices of well-bred people, and this too in things, which are in themselves indifferent. For the same reason—we mean unfamiliarity with the *convenances* of society—he will often, even when a man of good parts and good education, unconsciously do himself great disservice by the egotistical style of his conversation, talking enough for the entire circle, but without paying the slightest attention to the remarks of others. This cause alone has kept many an able man back from promotion or preferment."—*The Rock*, September 6, 1874.

* *Idem*.

acknowledged supreme. Her father could not but admit the reality of a faith which yielded such blessed fruit, and thus while gently leading him on step by step, she became precious and necessary to him, and was his earthly stay in those shortening days, which *he* knew were carrying him from her tender ministry to the Paradise, where he hoped in God's unmerited mercy to meet the dear ones, "loved and lost long since," and finally to share with them the triumphs of the Church. But all was not sunshine in the life of that noble woman. There were shady spots never brightened by earthly beams; and yet, because they were all of human love and worldly hopes, she dared not ask the Sun of suns to shine upon them. Her father, notwithstanding the softening of his moods, and his growing gentleness toward even what he called his daughter's weaknesses, had never by word or intimation withdrawn his objections to Mr.

Basil-Leigh's suit. There had been times, perhaps, when Lady Milicent might have led matters to a happy solution if she had herself possessed any faith in the reality of her hopes, or believed there was nothing to fear beyond her father's displeasure. There had been nothing to suggest such misgivings, for the little she had seen of Basil-Leigh since that happy and unhappy day, had been enough to assure her of his constancy and her continued power over him, while her own love had gathered strength in exile, and flourished upon the very ashes upon which it fed. Yet, explain it to herself even she could not. There was ever in her heart a profound presentiment that she should never be his wife, and almost unconsciously she formed plans and had contingent projects for the distant future, in which there seemed no common part between them.

It was a trial that wrung her heart to hear his praises sung by rich and poor ;

to note the evidences of his devotion and sleepless zeal in the very humblest work that she had ever sought to initiate or had even suggested, for in it all she read an abiding love and desire to justify that love, yet all the while herself tormented by the haunting fear that an impossible chasm was opening between them. She endeavoured to reason with such morbid fancies, so little like her fearless handling of other things, but they were not to be reasoned away, nor set aside by self-argument. A mysterious, shadowy fear had taken possession of her, and a barrier more invincible than her father's will rose in her imagination, whenever her thoughts wandered—and when did they not wander—to the one love of her life.

The early days of August, sultry and oppressive, came; the lengthening nights were heavy and disturbed by electric influences to which the Baron had long been very susceptible. In the early hours

of one such night was Lady Milicent summoned to her father's bedside, to hear him ask in failing voice to be forgiven for long years of harshness. With death stamped upon every feature and struggling with the throbbing flesh, he recalled in faltering speech each bitter word which long ago had pierced the loving hearts that asked for blessings, and amid the inarticulate gasps were mingled laments that he could not witness the union he had so cruelly prevented, with entreaties that Basil-Leigh might be called to receive his blessing while he ministered to the fleeting spirit.

It will be believed that the young man was speedily sought, but as we have seen him in London, we know that he was not found, nor did any one know where he was, nor how to reach him; neither was Noel, the "faithful" ministrant of St. Alphege, at hand, nor his whereabouts known any better than that of the parish

curate. But even before the messenger returned from the second fruitless errand, the daughters were bending with bated breath over the dear form. A father's eye should never again pierce those dim mists which obscured the loving faces, a father's blessing never again should escape those pale cold lips, and the sisters kept close watch, to mark if it might be when the freed spirit should rise from the dissolving clay.

A little after midnight only it was when the last sigh escaped the breathless bosom, and the spirit passed on without struggle or pang to that sweet abiding place where the wicked cease from troubling. A whispered, "we shall meet again, my children, commend my parting soul to the God who gave it," threw a halo of hope around the dying hour, unblest by priest or prayer save the formless petitions of two fond aching hearts.

Milicent clasped her sister convulsively

to her breast, and thus orphaned and well-nigh alone in the world, they wept together awhile in undisturbed relief; then kissing their precious dead, they committed it to careful hands, and spent what was left of the night in vain attempts to sleep and forget the shadowy form which had been filled with life and love when the sun went down. For the first time in centuries no Baron Leycour represented the ancient domain, nor could Lady Milicent fully realize that, in her own right and title, she was the head of the honoured house of Daneshurst.

Before the following noon the few connections and many family friends were notified of the sad event. Basil-Leigh, still absent upon his mysterious errand, failed thus to receive the word which would have brought him swiftly to the side of his dear mistress, and all that long summer day the orphan sisters in their shaded room sat listening for the

truant step, and wondering as well why there was nothing from Cecile or her mother's household.

The very first to call with words of sympathy to the bereaved, and in respectful homage to the memory of the dead, was Father Ambroise. He had even then, upon his own responsibility, forwarded a message to his family in London, and was sure that Lady Milicent would soon see her cousin if not Lady di Spagna herself.

Just thirty-six hours after the Baron's eyes were closed, Cecile, escorted by Basil-Leigh, appeared at Daneshurst. Whatever gloomy presentiments might hitherto have haunted Lady Milicent, they were blissfully dispelled by the enraptured fondness with which Basil-Leigh clasped her to his heart, saying in a tone that thrilled through aching mind and body, "Mine only, now, darling, is it not so? my own, forever," and he

kissed her brow, cheeks and lips with the fervour and freshness of love's first hour, —utterly forgetful that Cecile stood an astounded witness, patiently waiting for an interval in which she might embrace the bereaved cousin ; while May, in equal wonder, forgot to sob, and actually allowed her eyes to dry as she gazed at the unwonted spectacle, which she took to be a necessary act of consolation under the sad circumstances. She was quite convinced of the truth of this explanation a moment later, when he took her tenderly in his arms, and kissed her repeatedly too, while Cecile was silently clasped to the bosom of her blushing sister.

A few minutes later Lady Milicent led the way to the room where her father lay, not grimly confined, but as if in slumber upon his stately bed, which was richly draped in crimson velvet and embroidered with the Leycour arms. He was dressed as Cecile had ever seen him, and upon his

feet were the slippers she herself had wrought, her offering of last Christmas. If anything could have persuaded her that he was "not dead, but sleepeth," she would have been deceived. But alas! there can be no disguise. Try as the loving hands will to invest the rigid form with similitude of life, array it in familiar garb, temper the light that would too clearly define the sickening ghastliness of feature, or the immobility of countenance, death still is there in every motionless limb and unresponding touch, in angularity of form and shrunken flesh. Then too amid the flowery perfumes and spicy odours, there mingles a subtle something in the very atmosphere, which declares that "corruption hath not yet put on incorruption," and from which the loving, sensitive heart recoils, and refuses to think it can be in any wise part of the precious, idolized being, so lately animate in the cold and dust-bound clay before

us. Here, at least, in Daneshurst's halls, the faithful daughter had done everything in mortal power to rob this *chappelle ardente* of the gloomy associations of death. The lying in state itself was a concession to the people which had to be made, else a time-honoured custom of the place would have been violated. During certain hours each day all who had loved the Baron, or cared to have that "last sad look," were permitted to enter this temporary resting-place, which piety and filial affection had converted into a shrine of beauty and consolation. The rarest flowers adorned the room, spicy incense was burned from time to time, and lest its heavy fragrance should give oppression to the atmosphere, fresh breezes were admitted through well-chosen apertures, which relieved the burdened air, while it gave a freshness and coolness of temperature quite reviving, when contrasted with the world without, heated and scorched in

the fierce August sunshine. Tall tapers were skilfully disposed, so as to cast a chastened light upon the silent figure, and made it very natural to exclude the "garish light of day." Upon the walls were lettered scrolls, proclaiming Christian hope. Upon the hangings of the stately couch, was read the thrice blessed assurance, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," with its immortal antiphone. "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" "Because I live, ye shall live also," and "Even so, come Lord Jesus," were inscribed upon velvet panels in exquisitely wrought letters of white *immortelles*. Everything pointed to Life Eternal and faith only in the Lord of that Life, the One Mediator.

After a brief, mute and tearless contemplation of the silent form, Lady Millicent knelt reverently at the bedside, ere she turned from a place thus hallowed; her companions knelt beside her. There

was an instant's silence, and Basil-Leigh in hushed and solemn voice repeated the Lord's Prayer in which all joined. To this he added a prayer found in the liturgy of the American Church for those in affliction, the final collect from the burial service, that for All Saint's day, and concluded the brief but comforting act of devotion with those precious words in the visitation of the sick. "O Saviour of the world," and the benedictory prayers that follow.

Another pause of silent devotion, and they all slowly left the room. Lady Millicent clasped Basil-Leigh's hand in mute gratitude for the consolation and comfort of the impromptu worship. Her heart was full and she could not trust herself to speak. He perceived all this, and knowing what she would say, he tenderly drew her arm through his, and led her from the awful presence of the dead. When the door closed upon them, he took her again

in his arms, and whispered words of sweetest assurance of his own undying love and power to comfort and protect. But duties accumulated during two days' absence, he said, were pressing upon him, and he must not linger at her side; his absence would be brief, and Cecile would cheer her in the hours when he must be elsewhere. He bade her as they parted, "not to sorrow as those without hope."

Sorrow! she thought. He had been wiser to tell her not to forget in the newborn rapture with which her heart was bursting, the chastisement which had called him to her presence. In vain she upbraided herself for insensibility to her great bereavement, and sought by various devices to recall the poignancy of grief in which she was bowed when her cousin arrived.

Ten days later the last of the Barons de Leycour was left in his sombre rest-

ing-place, with the ancestral dust of generations past. His daughter took good care that the last rites should be in accordance with her father's well-known wishes, and as simple as his rank permitted. Many who had made Cecile open her eyes in amazement, as they talked of "Catholic burial," "mediæval pall," "High funeral celebration," were grievously disappointed, and declared that the young Baroness was false to her colours in permitting no more gorgeous ritual at the very outset of her authoritative rule. Not that there was anything wanting in form or state; flowers there were in exquisite variety and profusion, music too, but nothing of ceremonial display to which the departed would have objected in his lifetime.

A beautiful recognition of Lady Millicent's years of devotion was manifested as the simple will was read, immediately after the funeral. It unconditionally con-

fided immense and delicate trusts to her, the most precious of these being the guardianship of her sister, upon whom handsome settlements were made subject to Lady Milicent's control—she and Mr. Basil-Leigh being appointed guardians and trustees. Lady Milicent's rights in the estate were by inheritance, and outside of the interests to which we have alluded, there was comparatively little which the Baron could divert. Still there were a few objects of a personal nature connected with his early life, which he particularly desired his eldest daughter to possess, proving how tenderly he had thought of her, and correctly he had read her noble nature, even while he seemed to hold her at such a distance from his heart.

Meanwhile all those long summer days of sad uncertainty and general wretchedness, of darkened windows and whispered tones, with the suspension of daily duties, which intervened as here ever

between a death in a household and the burial, had been cheered by frequent visits of him who now stood her declared protector, betrothed and acknowledged as the beloved of her heart. She had ventured very soon to repeat to him, with faltering timidity, her father's dying words, his bitter repentance of past mistakes, and his eagerness to grant them their hearts' desire before his eyes were closed for ever. There was a satisfaction in this, for it removed the impression of having patiently awaited her father's death, and then in defiance of his wishes when living, to do at once exactly what he had desired her never to do.

Thus the days of bereavement became hours of chastened bliss, the recollection of which was buried deep in her soul, and come what might in life's uncertainties, these were memories never to be obliterated. It was not easy to talk of marriage under these circumstances, yet

the Baron had not long been in his grave when Basil-Leigh drew a reluctant consent from Lady Milicent to be his wife at once, even while her mourning was so recent and profound that it would excuse all festivity, and quite justify the quiet ceremony at their own chosen altar, where their wedded life would begin with a sacramental blessing. And thus it was agreed that the long probation should cease before Advent. Basil-Leigh at length consented to accept the incumbency of Daneshurst church, which was again becoming vacant by the preferment of the vicar. Cecile was all this while her cousin's guest and companion, and had taken quiet notes of all that was going on. Whatever may have been her secret sentiments toward the most favoured curate, she rejoiced at the change which the new state of things had brought to the heart of the young Baroness.

Early in September, while Lady di

Spagna and her ultramontane suite were quaffing at a German Spa, Lady Milicent was persuaded to seek rest and change of scene at a lovely spot on the Welsh coast, whither Cecile accompanied her, and where Mrs. Harewood and her children were already enjoying a quiet holiday after their London campaign. What else could be expected than the verification of Lady Ethel's prediction? True enough, upon that lady's return to Rook's Dene she was promptly asked to give her consent to her daughter's marriage with that "semi-plebeian Harewood," so called because his father had been the people's candidate and fought valiantly for the people's rights during his representation of a popular borough in the House of Commons. An unwilling consent was given, for she seemed to have no choice, and began to perceive that the gentle and undemonstrative girl was more difficult to manage than priests and titled dignitaries.

And thus the cousins became in perfect sympathy, and the two happy couples seemed likely to seek the congratulations of those to whom Daneshurst Castle and Rook's Dene were centres of interest.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEMI-PLEBEIAN HAREWOOD.



GERALD HAREWOOD who had thus won the heart of our fair young friend, was in all respects worthy of the gentle, lovely girl. We have heard his tastes and pursuits rather severely characterized at Lady di Spagna's supper-table. It is due to him therefore to say if these "made the money go," as had been asserted, they were only the tastes and pursuits of a refined and educated young

Englishman, without vices or degrading proclivities. Neither Harewood nor Cecile, it must be admitted, belonged to the heroic school which included Lady Milicent and her ardent betrothed. Consequently their demonstrations of regard for each other had very little of the high-strained quality in their tone, but belonged to the quieter romance of life.

Early mutual admiration and respect insensibly developed into stronger and tenderer feelings. Thus it came to pass one bright day in their autumn holiday, that Gerald found himself alone with Cecile in one of their rugged rambles. The road was rough and the way generally toilsome, quite enough so to justify Gerald's frequent assistance and the authoritative air with which he drew her arm through his. As the little hand, slightly trembling, perhaps from fatigue, perhaps from certain forecasting emotions, rested lightly on his arm, an over-power-

ing impulse seized him to clasp the fingers and press the arm a little more closely and tenderly than was quite necessary for mere support. She did not dream of resenting such familiar touch, and only raised her eyes to his for one moment, when they drooped as quickly, for she read something in his gaze which sent the bright blushes to her fair cheek and brow. The story was simply told. He loved her and was loved.

We need not linger with them in that first sweet hour of purest bliss, when to the enraptured gaze a paradise is revealed. Better that we discreetly leave them for awhile, to tell in a few words what we know of the favoured lover and his antecedents.

We have already said that the Harewood family had long been on friendly terms with Cecile's parents, while they were cherished friends and often welcome guests at Daneshurst Castle. The family,

which was of good lineage, was much respected in Devonshire, where their home had been for at least two generations; their circumstances were easy though not affluent, while their interior surroundings embraced all that could be desired of refined and simple elegance.

Gerald was not a University man, but had been carefully educated with particular reference to the civil service of India, whither he went immediately after completing his preparations. His prospects were opening brilliantly there and a bright career seemed before him, when his father died almost suddenly. His sisters were then still schoolgirls and his mother in delicate health, little fitted to battle single-handed with the cares and anxieties of her widowed position.

When the melancholy tidings reached the young man at his colonial post, he did not pause long in the consideration of his duty. He thought with an anxious heart

of his beloved mother in her loneliness, with no masculine hand to protect her or guide his young sisters, and without needless delay, although with a sense of bitter disappointment, he resigned his position, closing thus more than one avenue to worldly distinction and rapid accumulation of wealth. He returned to England, and as far as he could, took his father's place in the family and in the more public duties where his father had won an honoured name. In the mother's gratitude and the proud affection of his young sisters, he found compensation for the worldly sacrifices he had made for them. To that fond mother Cecile was promptly led, even while the blushes were lingering upon her cheek.

"She will not rob you of a son," said Gerald, as he put her hand within his mother's, "but will be another daughter. Our modest dovecote shall be in Devon, so near the maternal nest that there will


be hourly flittings from one to the other."

Mrs. Harewood who knew a good deal, and suspected more, of Cecile's position at Rook's Dene, tenderly took the blushing maiden to her heart, and gave both her and Gerald the blessing they asked, declaring if her son had searched the world over he could not have found a sweeter mate, nor one whom her maternal affections would enclose more fondly.

And thus it seemed, unless Lady Ethel should raise some storm of opposition, that for once the "course of true love might run smooth."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ORATORY.



LADY DI SPAGNA had a mania for building. No sooner were workmen dismissed from one quarter, than they re-appeared in another. Chapel, schools, and parsonage being completed, her thoughts returned to Rook's Dene, retaining always their ecclesiastical bent. While Cecile was visiting her orphaned cousins, and tarrying with them in sweet bondage on

the Welsh coast, a very surprising and tasteful little structure had been erected upon the most unromantic site of an abandoned ice-house, which more recently had been an improvised summer bower. It stood upon an elevation of six or eight feet, to which a narrow footpath gradually mounted from the north entrance of the house, quite near a postern gate, where, in earlier years, the indignant Easelie came face to face with his recreant sheep.

The building was octagonal and familiarly known as "The Oratory," being in fact Lady Ethel's private chapel. It had already been dedicated, when Cecile returned, by some religious rite which made it lawful for even mass to be said within. There was accommodation for not more than twenty persons. It was mainly lighted from the roof, having only two small lancet windows, one on either side of a diminutive porch, which served

as a façade to the building, the other sides being undistinguishably regular and plain. These windows were simply glazed, but were furnished with blinds within, which, when drawn, were altogether impenetrable to the eye. In the eastern angles there was a small altar, appropriately railed off, and exactly opposite to this stood a tiny organ, not of much power but of exquisite sweetness. Over the altar was a fine copy of Spagnoletto's *Mater Dolorosa*, and before the organ a curtained screen was placed to conceal the performer and the mechanical contrivances by which the instrument was filled with wind.

It frequently happened as winter approached, and the weather grew unfavourable, that Lady di Spagna was, or fancied she was, unable to go a half mile further to church; upon which occasions the entire household was assembled in this picturesque little spot for worship.

M. di Foligno officiated ordinarily, although once or twice Father Ambroise had been able to say mass as the lady requested. The place made no great impression upon Cecile, who had grown accustomed to her mother's ever-varying building schemes, and probably would never have entered the building a second time, except that she found great pleasure in using the organ which was quite within her powers. Moreover she had been urged to practise as much as she liked by her mother, who was anxious to keep the instrument in good condition.

Pardon, good reader, our lingering so long at Lady Ethel's latest shrine ; for it was destined to become a prominent feature in unfolding the fortunes of many of the chief personages of our story.

Advent was drawing nigh, and with it the day was approaching when the Baroness should give her hand to Basil-Leigh.

It was a cold and dull November afternoon, almost dusk, when Cecile and her betrothed parted at the aforesaid postern gate. The young lady sauntered slowly homeward, taking the road by the Oratory. The sight of the quiet place rather inspired her to beguile the "witching hour" at the organ, as she had frequently already done at the closing day. Upon trying to unlatch the door, which generally stood wide open, she found it securely locked. This in itself did not make any great impression upon her, although it was the first time she had ever found it fastened; supposing it was a precaution taken at night, she was turning away, but very naturally, before leaving the porch, looked through the uncurtained window, which required no effort. She saw but an empty room with one lamp burning with a star-like spark, suspended over the altar. She lingered an instant impressed by the quiet solemnity

of the chapel, still light enough to reveal the sorrowful expression upon the pictured face, which was not as usual covered by a curtain. She retreated a few steps, reflecting upon the wonderful power of the Romish Church over the faith and allegiance of its children, with its strange fascination for even the unsympathizing alien.

She retired still further and stood for a moment, she scarcely knew under what spell, recalling the sweet memories of the recent hour with her beloved, allowing them to intertwine with her later reflections, when suddenly she perceived a blaze of light within the building, so startling that she could only think that a conflagration had burst out. Involuntarily she ran to the window, and as quickly retreated, for she perceived that the room was not only brilliantly lighted but as if miraculously occupied. The blinds were quickly drawn, but not before she had

caught a distinct view of Mr. Basil-Leigh and Mr. Noel, the pastor of St. Alphege. She had scarcely time to retreat to some shrubbery, when the door was noiselessly opened from within, and her mother's friend of Foligno stepped outside the porch, taking a survey of the premises, which seemed to satisfy him, for he quickly retired, bolting the door inside. Cecile happily was in perfect shadow. Her dress was black, which with the sombre trees and heavy shrubs quite shielded her from discovery. She was too discreet to tarry long in such mysterious proximity, but how was she to explain the evidence of her own senses? Certainly the room was empty when she looked through the window into it, and she could not find any satisfaction in the explanation that several men were hidden behind the tiny organ screen which scarcely concealed herself, or in the corners, with which the place was well supplied. And

what could explain Mr. Basil-Leigh's presence, she asked. Surely it must all be a dream; some hideous nightmare in which she was walking. Alas! then, she had had such dreams before; and she recalled with a significance which never occurred to her before, the presence of her cousin's betrothed at the religious levée in London. The fearful suspicion seized her that Basil-Leigh was about to take a step which would either drag her cousin with him to popery, or leave her stranded, wrecked and broken-hearted, where he and she should part for ever.

In sorrowful perplexity she entered the house, and prepared herself to meet the "select party" which her mother had informed her would be at dinner that day. She kept her thoughts to herself, meanwhile, and said nothing of her mysterious adventure. At dinner, her thoughtful face and pre-occupied manner, however, did not altogether escape observation,

which happily she perceived, and rallied all her strength to push her advantage to some good position. But the enemy baffled every attempt. With all the adroitness she could command she attempted to lead a conversation with the priest Foligno, next to whom she was seated. She first tried to open a discussion upon the popular subject of ritualism, protesting at the same time she had no sympathy with it. Foligno did not hesitate to admit that it was a very pleasant sight to the faithful, who now-a-days found good Catholics ready made, and had only to give them a good title for their pretended claims. She asked if he thought the movement had reached its height in their own neighbourhood, for example. He had no opportunity to judge. It was possible it had reached the limit of the law and people's patience. If the clergy wanted more they would have to go where it was lawful to have it.


To this Cecile imprudently ventured to say, there were two or three in the vicinity quite ripe for the step, and she daily expected to hear that both ministers and people had gone to the enemy *en masse*.

“Really! really!” exclaimed the priest, opening wide his eyes. “This young lady encourages me to hope that great prizes are in store for us. A consummation, Miss Fayne, devoutly to be prayed for. May your prophecies be speedily realized. Is it indiscreet to ask to whom you specially refer?”

Poor Cecile was much discomfited. The expression of her fears was not a prediction, and the wary old man well knew it. She retreated at once into utter silence. She would certainly not learn from him if the two suspected shepherds had gone, or proposed going into other pastures with their sheep.

CHAPTER VII.

A MORNING VISIT TO THE ORATORY.



WITH the cold grey morning of the morrow, Cecile was in the grounds and at the Oratory. She walked studiously around the small Zion, and easily counted its bulwarks. The outside was no difficult study. No hidden sliding-door, nor disjointed angle was possible in the solid masonry. The pretty little grey building upon the grassy knoll, perfectly inoffensive in

appearance and graceful in design, seemed unable to inspire such chapters of mystery as had revealed themselves to Cecile upon her sleepless couch. The outer walls were blank, pierced only for the porch and lancets we have described. No half hidden ladder could carry the portly priests to any imaginary entrance in the dome; the leafless oak, which in summer cast a graceful shade, was too far from the building to be of any service in weaving a romance. After having scrutinized every crack, and touched every stone within her reach, it occurred to the puzzled damsel to look through the window again. The door, however, stood invitingly open, and there seemed no reason why she should not pursue her investigations within. No more room for mystery there than without; and she was driven to confess that the men must have been in the room somewhere in obscurity when she looked in at the picture, and in the

deepening twilight she had not seen them. Yet it seemed absurd to suppose that nearly a dozen full grown men could possibly be overlooked in such a miniature chapel.

While she stood before the altar at a loss what to think, almost doubting her own identity or sanity, Lady di Spagna glided noiselessly through the open door as ordinary mortals generally do, and affecting a start of surprise exclaimed,

“Why, Cecile, you have not been practising in this bitterly cold place, my dear? The organ is getting sadly out of tune. I wish it could be made warmer here, and I would beg you to use it every day. I am here now, indeed, to see what we can do to make the chapel more comfortable. A stove or a furnace must be speedily set up, else the organ and that beautiful picture will go to ruin, to say nothing of the health of the worshippers. But where can a chimney be built?”

Cecile, rejoiced at an opportunity for an authorised exploration, peeped behind the organ and into angles—corners there were none, and suggested, half-jocosely, that her mother would have to fall back upon the very modern and matter-of-fact gas heater. Lady Ethel seized the proposition with evident joy, declaring she had never credited her daughter with so much practical sense. Then, assuming the question settled, she became suddenly solemn, and crossed herself before kneeling at the narrow rail. Cecile was impelled to kneel beside her, and while the mother's brief litany to the Virgin and saints was whispered, the pure-hearted maiden, on bended knee, asked God to lighten her way, and guide her through difficulties which she had a gloomy foreboding were gathering around her. The two rose from their devotions, and were turning from the chilly shrine with pleasant thoughts of the warmth and cheer of

the bright breakfast-room, when Lady Ethel seemed struck with an after-thought.

“Ring that bell, Cecile,” she said, pointing to a half-hidden bell-handle. “I will give directions at once for that heater; but you need not linger in the cold. Tell M. di Spagna I will follow you in ten minutes.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISIT TO DANESHURST.



AS soon after breakfast as possible, Cecile was on her way to Daneshurst. She had a painful task before her which she knew would grow no less painful by procrastination.

She had said quietly at home that she proposed spending the day with her cousins, and might not return that night. Her intercourse with Lady Milicent had become very intimate and sympathetic

since the days of bereavement. In that interval their hearts had both expanded beneath the genial influences which soften the affections towards all mankind. Upon this particular morning of which we speak, Cecile was received with unusual warmth, which made her task all the harder. The queenly graces of her cousin's face and form seemed to reflect a chastened beauty, like perfect architecture in unclouded moonlight. Cecile was not quite prepared, however, for the confidential disclosure that in a very few days her cousin would resign her maidenly independence. She was thinking of the face she had seen in the Oratory the evening before, and looked much too unsympathetic at the announcement.

“But, Cecile dear, you do not seem half so pleased as I hoped,” her cousin said playfully. “What is the reserve now in that silly little head? Do you fear to lose

me altogether? Nay, you will be quite as dear to me as ever!"

"Oh, no, no, Milicent! it is not that. I know that we are friends for ever, unless, unless—but I am sure you will always hate me after this! I do not know how to say what has brought me here. Let me ask, solemnly, one question. Dear, dear Milicent, are you sure of Mr. Basil-Leigh?"

"Why, what do you mean, my dear Cecile? In what respect sure of him, dear? His love—his devotion—his position—explain; of what do I need to assure you?"

"None of these, Milicent. Of course he worships you, and cannot conceal it if he would. If his position contents you, it should suit me; but, oh tell me, cousin, do you know that he is what he professes to be? Is he a Protestant minister, or a disguised Jesuit?"

By this time Cecile had taken both of

her cousin's hands, and was kneeling at her feet. Her honest blue eyes were fixed upon Lady Milicent's face, and were filled with rising tears quite ready to flow down the cheeks. Those who knew her well would appreciate the effort it had cost her to bring such facts as she possessed to her cousin's consideration. Lady Milicent returned the tearful look with a searching glance; but her cheek grew pale, and a half-stifled gasp told Cecile that, gently as it had been administered, the shock had proved severe, and was not altogether masked under the quiet smile and gentle rebuff.

“ Ah, you timid little Lutheran! Is that what you fear? I began to dread some terrible revelation. You scent heresy in every breeze, and spy popery in every step. No, darling; Gabriel does not profess the Protestantism by which you judge men's orthodoxy, and he writes himself *a Catholic priest!*”

Cecile shook her head, and rose from her knees. "No, no, Milicent!" she said, sorrowfully; "I am not quoting my Protestantism, which, according to you, puts me outside of the Church of England. I judge Mr. Basil-Leigh by your own standard. It pains me to tell you what I fear; nor would I do so were I not sure I should otherwise fail in my duty to one whom I love almost beyond all others in this world. You must listen, Milicent, even if you send me from you for ever, for telling you that I believe Mr. Basil-Leigh to be as thorough a Roman Catholic as my mother or my brother Ambroise, although not quite so honest. In fact, I believe him to be a disguised Jesuit, deceiving you and sanctifying unrighteous means for some proposed end, which, in his eyes, is good and holy. I *know* there are such at work in England."

The poor girl said this with a startling solemnity, which proved at least her own

belief in the assertion, while the words went like cold steel deep into her cousin's heart.

“Nay, Cecile, this is too much!” coldly withdrawing her hand. “You are not justified in basing such accusations upon your own ill-grounded suspicions. You know, as well as I, what it implies to call a man a Jesuit. Had not Mr. Basil-Leigh been frank and fearless in his manifestations, Protestants of extreme sensibility would have found no cause for alarm. His trials have all come from his open and dauntless advocacy of principles at which a few—thank Heaven, only a few—now-a-days cavil. But we will discuss him no more. In a few days he will have taken a step which will defeat countless false predictions, and dissipate many mists which have gathered around people's ideas of him. I have no fear. I thank you for your well-intentioned warnings, my little Cecile, and you must let me tell you they are all

founded on fancies of this little ultra-protestant brain."

Cecile was too honest to let the matter drop, and to unwilling ears she told the story of the eve before, with the mysterious apparition of the Oratory, nor did she withhold the fact of Basil-Leigh's presence at the clerical supper party in London, while Milicent was alone in her sorrow, counting the weary and desolate hours until he should be at her side. For a moment Lady Milicent was slightly staggered. Love is ever quick in excuse and plausible in speech, and it prompted her to give a ready explanation of his appearance amid brethren of a distinctly hostile community. At the same time, her generous nature inspired her to ask her cousin's forgiveness for the hasty words she had spoken; for even her infatuated eyes could see there was something more substantial than fancy upon which to build the warning she had received. It can

well be surmised that the day at Daneshurst, after this jarring introduction, was not spent as pleasantly and happily as days generally were with the cousins, and that Cecile, whose head ached, and whose heart was heavy with a load it could not shake off, took leave in the early hours of that winter afternoon.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WRECK OF HOPE.

“ I know not how it is
But a foreboding presses on my heart,
At times, I sicken. I have heard
And from men learned, that ere the touch
(The common grosser touch) of good or ill;
Oft times a subtler sense informs
Some spirits of th' approach of things to be!”



ECILE had not long departed,
and Lady Milicent sat dream-
ily reviewing the strange com-
munications of her cousin, trying
to reconcile to herself a state of
things which she failed to make clear to

Cecile, feeling at loss to decide whether she should appeal to Mr. Basil-Leigh for an explanation, or rest satisfied in her own perfect confidence in him, assured that whatever he did was right, and not to be questioned. Her reveries were brought to a close by the announcement of the name beloved, and the familiar footfall was heard. Oh, how quick are the ears and eyes of love! Why did her heart sink at the hour it was wont to be its happiest and lightest? Why did she press her lips, all colour leaving them, as step by step he mounted slowly and heavily, when he was used to spring as only the light of heart can move. What fearful sorrow had cast its shadow over him, since she saw—and it was but yesterday—his bright and happy face? He walked slowly and gloomily into the room, more like the ghost of him she loved. How quickly and suspiciously thought travels! He had met Cecile, she thought, who, perchance,

had told him the dreadful charge she had carried to her cousin, and she rapidly armed herself with assurances of undying faith in his honour.

He paused a moment at the door as if to gather strength, and then a slow and lifeless step carried him to her side. Neither had she the courage to start gaily forward with sweet and precious words of welcome. A shadow, like that of the grave itself, rested upon his pale face. His eyes seemed to have known no slumber for uncounted nights ; his lips were tightly closed, cold and colourless as death itself. For a moment not a word broke the strange silence. He held out then his arms towards the trembling maiden, and, as if some spirit had told her all, she threw herself upon his breast in a wail of anguish she could not stifle. His cold blue lips grew warm and rosy as they met hers, or kissed away the tears which scalded her cheeks. The heavily laden

present was briefly obliterated, in one farewell as it were, to life's romance. But too soon the realization of the sorrow which hung over them, with the vision of the long, dark future mingled with the exquisite rapture of the passing moments, which were like minutes wrung from death's embrace, in which each read the other's undying love. With husky voice, as he still held the bounding heart closer and closer to his own, he murmured, "One last caress, one parting clasp to this aching breast, my Milicent—my queen! Was ever woman so madly loved? Did ever creature thus worship clay?" and he held her out from him that he might gaze once more upon the noble face before he said the fatal word. Then again folding her to him, tenderly and closely, with his cheek against her own, the sentence came in hoarse and broken whispers.

"Milicent, Milicent, we must part—for ever part! I must leave you this day, to

see you thus no more! Can you, will you, believe in my utter irresponsibility? I yield you only in obedience to a decree that I cannot even name to you. This hour of living death, this surrender of the heart's life and living warmth, is not—oh, you will believe it—is not my free will and choice! A destiny against which I have battled long, so very long, and which I fondly hoped I had vanquished, has but this day proved my master. It bids me think no more of happiness or human love." He led her in trembling but tearless sorrow to their accustomed seat, placing himself beside her, as in happier days.

"Milicent," he broke out afresh, "can you trust me—can you believe me? Elect of all the earth to me—peerless among women, most tender, most true, is there hope of forgiveness for the cruel hand that stabs? Is there mercy enough in that gentle heart to pity while forgiving,

and to believe that the decree to which I must submit, wrings all hope and joy from the heart which it thus tears from its body? Oh, what joy to die! To have died yesterday, and to feel that in dying I had left a sweet place in your memory—that you might thus think fondly of me with hope in the eternal future. But, alas! this is denied—to my unutterable anguish. For me is life—long years, perchance, of living death—to exist on and be forgotten; never once to think of the blessed past, in its happiest hours—to be denied the smallest recompense that consoles other men in such a wreck of hope! Never again to touch this dear hand in all my living years—these lips, nor hear the words upon which my soul has feasted—that would be bitterness enough! But in such banishment to be haunted by the pursuing thought that you despise me, you turn in scorn from me, and have never one kindly, forgiving

memory! How shall I bear the wretchedness that is born of this hour? Yet here am I, raving of my own grief, selfish to the very last, thinking of myself, and not one word for the anguish of a heart, thrilling the very deepest notes of woe!"

Milicent had not uttered one word. Reproach she could not, remonstrate she would not, while her heart was aching as such pure, strong hearts do ache, but do not break. Withal, there was an inward rebellion of her nature against such mysterious whispers of a destiny which could not be mentioned; and she asked, in trembling voice, "Why, Gabriel, when you have trusted so much to me, will you not confide the motive of this stern tyranny, which you call destiny? If it be impossible for us to defy it, surely this sad shipwreck of our hopes can be contemplated more resignedly if we both understand the causes, and look firmly at them. At least, this hopeless separation might

be cheered by the conviction that it was a sacrifice to some high duty, that, while we might never be more than friends, we could be such in the truest and holiest sense of the word."

He sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "How can you speak so calmly, coldly, almost reproachfully, when my over-charged heart is bursting? Oh, Milicent! can this hour be to you what it is to me? But yesterday you were as blithe as a bird, joyously consenting to name the very hour when we should start together in a path which to-day we find fatally barred. From this hour—Milicent, do you realise what I say?—from this hour, when I leave you, we meet never again as we have met; if, indeed, we meet at all!"

"I am trying to realize it, Gabriel," she said with a shudder, her death-like countenance and shivering frame disproving the calm and indifference of which he accused her, and betrayed the fierce con-

flict and storm beneath the cool, smooth surface. "I cannot fully realize it, until I know the obstacles of which you speak—the destiny you invest with such destroying power. Tell me, are these obstacles your own creation? This destiny, have you yourself invoked it? Surely one to whom you have confided so much, could be trusted a little farther?"

"Milicent, I swear not lightly, nor use words at random; but, here in God's presence I declare to you that I am held by a power which controls me utterly, which I cannot reveal even to you, although your parting thoughts and words accuse me of infidelity and fail, infinitely fail, to measure the depths of my boundless love for you."

"Nay, never that, Gabriel," she murmured. "I can never doubt your love. It is your judgment that I might not sustain. These may be morbid fears, compunctions of conscience, the long slumber-

ing conflict revived, in which my counsel might aid or my sympathy console. I do not seek to modify your decision, I only beg in the name of a love which is not far from idolatry that you give me your full confidence. The long dreary future might thus partly be relieved of its gloom, the sad and crushing present become less insupportable, if only we may be assured of that bond of union, hidden and invisible though it be."

"It cannot be. It may not be, Millicent. Oblivion, utter and traceless, of the past. A future without one hope, one humble supplication in which our interests and affections mingle, or the sweet and cherished thought, that amid our matchless grief, separated and hopeless, each was praying for the other, and thus mysteriously making the burden lighter. No! that cannot be. Worse than death, and more bitter than its pangs is the trial that awaits us. This only I can confide

and that much, perchance, is a breach of sacred trust. Within a few day's time I shall be bound by vows which close me for ever from human love."

There was a dead silence. Milicent shuddered again, and something like a moan escaped her. Her eyes meanwhile fixed upon his face, not yet well enough schooled to meet that gaze and betray no emotion.

"Gabriel! Gabriel! I understand it now, blinded as I have been and slow of perception. It is then too true all that has been brought to me. Your mysterious errand in London, when my poor father was calling in the trembling tones of death for your loving ministry; your presence last night, too, with sympathizing brethren at Rook's Dene. It is all explained, and a thousand vague insinuations and obscure suggestions besides. I ask no more. I would not for worlds penetrate more deeply into the hidden

destiny. Here, Gabriel, I should not wear this ring, nor this, nor this," she said, as one and another souvenir of happier days was taken from her person. "Take back these vain memorials of a love they could not typify. It is not often I hope that a wounded heart is thus exposed to living burial. Leave me now, Gabriel, and have no fear that your long belated confidence will ever be betrayed. Your secret is safe; but leave me now, while I have strength to dismiss you."

"Milicent, will you forgive?"

"Freely, as I hope for God's forgiveness. Would that I could forget the pictures upon which I have been forced to look. On this side, truth, honesty, and devotion, as the pure in heart can only offer. Upon the reverse, stand falsehood, craft, and perverted zeal. A chasm divides the two, utterly impassable, which neither Christian hope, nor godlike charity can bridge. Farewell! May God in His

infinite, forgiving mercy guide you unto all truth and repentance. You will leave me now."

She was turning sorrowfully away, as he sprang toward her.

"One word of blessing, Milicent. Send me not out like Ishmael in the desert, hated, outcast, and beyond the covenant of blessing."

"Ay! sad image, but too true. Was it not the child of the bondwoman that was cast forth?" was Milicent's bitter reply, scarcely uttered ere she repented, and half-extended her hand for the last parting clasp as he threw himself in uncontrollable anguish at her very feet, picturing in the convulsive writhings of his strong frame and proud spirit the agony with which men weep.

"Oh, Milicent, that you could know the travail of my soul, the racking, torturing struggle between duty and desire; bound by the iron grasp of one, and the

golden chains of the other ; for then I am sure if you ever think of me hereafter, it will be in tender pity, with a faint conception of the sacrifice with which I surrender you, and thus inflict this grievous, bitter wrong upon your own poor loving heart. At least, compassion would mingle with the horror with which you gaze into the chasm that separates 'truth and its handmaidens' from 'falsehood and its minions,'—that terrible abyss which destiny has hewn between ourselves." While speaking he seized her hands with no gentle grasp, and placed them upon his head as he bowed before her.

There was but a woman's heart after all in that proud breast, and her tears fell fast, while it was in half-stifled sobs that she again prayed God to guide him unto perfect truth, and grant him light and life eternal. Once more his lips were pressed upon the cold trembling hands he had held upon his head in vice-

like grasp, and before she could bid him rise he had started to his feet. In another instant, without a parting glance, he had gone from her presence, and that chapter of life's romance was closed for ever.

He had gone, and with him the very sun of her human existence. She stood spell-bound for awhile, gazing at the door which had shut him from her sight, listening to the slow receding steps, the closing of the heavy gate, and the distant footfall upon the gravel walks. Then she glanced at her hands, still smarting from the pressure in which he had held them. That more than anything brought an appreciation of the dreary story; word by word was repeated as she looked upon the hand despoiled of the gem which had sparkled there, his earliest gift, and the ever present talisman to recall an absent love. Happily for her she could weep, and such tears as she had never shed, with sobs the like of which had never before

torn her poor bosom, brought a measure of relief. This storm of feeling, like most violent commotions of nature, was soon spent, but the scattered wrecks lay all around, with shattered hopes never again to be rebuilt, and revelations of wrong and falsehood not to be forgotten.

She took her place at dinner, paler and more thoughtful than usual, while an unfeigned headache excused her want of appetite and haggard looks. But she had not waited even to that hour to write a note to Cecile, characteristic of her noble nature, begging pardon for the angry demonstration of the morning, and thanking her cousin for her kindness of intention in her warning words. But who can picture the change that day had brought over all that this life bounded! It was as if sunlight and loveliness had been banished from earth at a word, while she found herself groping in chaotic darkness, amid discordant cries and hopeless terror.

CHAPTER X.

AN ACCOMPLISHED GOVERNESS.



At the Baron's younger daughter we have only glanced at long intervals; but it is now quite time that we bestow some words upon one who filled an important part in the little world where we have lingered through so many years. We have seen her a bright and joyous child, taking great liberties with her moody parent, and distracting his mind with her theological explanations. The promise of her fair

childhood was not falsified. Year by year she carried mirth into the darkest recesses of the ancestral home, and cheered the hearts which without her presence would have been sad and heavy. In appearance she was precisely the opposite of her stately sister, and in form and feature much more resembled her cousin Cecile, but was more sprightly, quick, and witty, and perhaps promised less beauty, according to general standards of criticism; but, all in all, she was a captivating maiden, and not the least of her attractions was her evident unconsciousness of possessing any particular charm.

Long before her father's removal, a lady governess and general companion had been introduced in the family by Mr. Basil-Leigh. She was French by marriage and education, and only half English by parentage, though born, it was believed, in England. Her knowledge of the world was much more extensive than that of

most ladies of her position. She was at home in any language which cultivated people would employ, and her merry-hearted pupil frequently suggested what a desirable acquisition she would have been at the Tower of Babel. Nor was it a mere smattering that she possessed, like the phrase repertoire of a learned courier or accomplished lady's-maid; for certainly in five modern languages she could converse grammatically and learnedly, while writing elegantly in them upon all subjects. At the same time she could have sustained as creditable an examination in the dead languages as many young Oxonians. In musical gifts she was not deficient, nor in *belles lettres*, while in the very vulgar acquirements of history, geography and arithmetic, there were few to surpass her. The woman was a marvel to the late Baron, who described her as his polyglot encyclopædia, frequently saying whatever might be his private grudges

against Mr. Basil-Leigh upon theological grounds, he should be lastingly grateful for the introduction of such an incarnate library into his household.

The lady was not personally repulsive, neither was she pedantic nor presumptuous. Her manners were quiet and unobtrusive, although she displayed great decision and firmness of character, being precisely the disciplinarian needed to keep the effervescent Mabel in proper training, and counteract the danger of her being spoiled by father and sister. Without ever gaining much of the child's affection, she soon obtained supreme influence over her. This at first greatly nettled Lady Milicent, for the little one would do nothing, go nowhere, nor even wear anything, or read a book, without Madame Grillet's sanction. But as there appeared no disposition on the part of the governess to abuse such control, the sister wisely submitted; and before the Baron's death

the lady had acquired an honourable position in the household, and had won the deference of all the servants, which is a proof either of rare virtue or consummate tact. There was one heart, however, which never warmed towards her. From the very first day of her entrance into Daneshurst, she had inspired Lady Milicent with a feeling not easy for that young lady to define. Dislike seemed too strong a word, while it was more than indifference she felt. There seemed nothing tangible, no one quality upon which this aversion could fix itself. Lady Milicent was therefore bound to ascribe the sentiment to one of those unaccountable prejudices which force a lodgment occasionally in the most generous natures. Yet the consciousness of harbouring an unjust or unwarrantable sentiment of repulsion troubled her tender conscience, and became one of Lady Milicent's crosses, against which she daily prayed, and, in

secret atonement, was moved to a great many acts of kindness and consideration towards the object of her hidden repugnance. She was far too noble to seek causes for self-justification, although there was something ever telling her if she could read Madame's heart she would find there a similar feeling towards herself. But as this was no more than an intuition, she did not allow it to influence her words or conduct. Happily, up to the time of the Baron's death, their views respecting May's doings had never clashed, inasmuch as Lady Milicent had always conceded any little difference on the ground of her own inexperience. It can therefore be believed that she was greatly surprised when the first serious issue came.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOVERNESS IN REBELLION.



IN the wretchedness of mind which followed the severance of her engagement to Basil-Leigh, Lady Milicent took a sudden resolve to go abroad, and in the distractions of travel seek to forget in a measure her own griefs, while such a step spared her the pain of encountering in her daily walks and occupations the living reminder of buried hopes and joys. The resolve was taken within twenty-four

hours. Hoping to reach Rome before Christmas, and accomplish other things in the interval, she made her preparations at once. As her plans embraced her sister, the very morning after the rupture she sent for Madame, and confided her sudden purpose to that lady, whom she left at liberty to accompany them (which Lady Milicent secretly hoped she would not find to her taste or convenience), or, if it pleased her better, to remain at Daneshurst. Lady Milicent was utterly astounded to be met by the bland assurance that it was quite impossible for May to suffer such an interruption to her studies; that she, Madame, could not, for reasons she did not care to state, leave England during the winter, and would therefore remain at Daneshurst with her pupil, whose education would thus go on as usual. All the hauteur and pride of the Leycour blood since the Norman Conquest seemed to concentrate in the chief representative

of the house. Certainly nothing could be more withering than the tone and words in which Madame was informed that the question had not been brought to her for approval; that Lady Milicent's plans would be carried out in such a manner that her sister's education would be advanced, rather than retarded; but since Madame had signified her inability to go abroad, there need be no further discussion, and her services would no longer be required at Daneshurst. A carriage would be at her disposal, at her earliest possible convenience, to take her wherever she might indicate.

Madame did not show the astonishment, nor betray the shock with which she received her dismissal, but with sorrowful manner, said very quietly, "Your ladyship will excuse the great liberty of my asking such a question, but what are her guardian's views upon this subject?"

"I am my sister's guardian," replied the Baroness, loftily. "I take the place

of a parent to her. There is no one to question my decision on this point!"

"Pardon me, if I humbly suggest that Mr. Basil-Leigh should be consulted. He takes great interest in the young lady's studies, and, I believe, is joint-guardian with my Lady Leycour."

"Mr. Basil-Leigh's guardianship does not extend to such matters. My plans remain unchanged," replied the incensed lady, growing pale with intensity of feeling. "You will consider your duties at Daneshurst at an end!"

Had the legions of evil been recalled to earth and let loose upon the insulted sister, she would scarcely have been more cruelly wounded.


"I beg ten thousand pardons!" said Madame, perceiving the storm she had aroused in Lady Milicent's breast, "for seeming so very intrusive. Will your ladyship forgive me, and let me say that I have so frequently witnessed the difficulties that arise from one guardian acting

without the knowledge and concurrence of the other, as in the present case, that perhaps in my zeal I have been indiscreet and have spoken too plainly? My pupil is very dear to me; I have her interest solely at heart, and—although you may not believe it, Lady Leycour—your own welfare scarcely less.”

She narrated, then, several convenient and illustrative anecdotes, to which Lady Milicent listened in silence. She was not to be appeased. The very fact that the woman should know and insinuate that there might be clashing of opinion between the guardians, was sufficiently exasperating to justify extreme measures. In spite of herself and her generous instincts, therefore, she could not overlook the insolent intrusion of her judgment, for which, moreover, she did not believe Madame was really penitent. She declined any further discussion, requesting the offender to retire, which she did without further apology.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GUARDIANS AT VARIANCE.

ADY MILICENT'S simple preparations were soon completed, and the day before her intended departure from Daneshurst, the same, as we shall see, which launched poor Cecile into so much sorrow—her sister came to her with tears in her eyes, and an open note in her hand.

“Look here, Milicent. I am so disappointed!” cried the child. Your Mr. Basil-

Leigh is so cruel! Madame made me write to him—and that puts me in mind to ask you why he does not come here every-day,—and this is his answer.”

Lady Milicent took the letter and read,

“ My Dear May,

“ I have but one moment in which to acknowledge your sweet little note, and to say how sorry I am that I cannot consent to your going abroad at present. If you work industriously for a year or two, you will then derive more pleasure and profit from the trip, which just now would do you a deal of harm. I hope this will not be a very great disappointment, for it is only a postponement of what you will enjoy much more hereafter.

“ Be sure that I am your very sincere friend and well-wisher,

“ G. BASIL-LEIGH.”

It would be very difficult to describe

the tumult of feeling with which Lady Milicent looked upon the characteristic writing so familiar to her, and but lately framing words so precious to her heart. There was a strange fascination in it, too; yet what utter ignoring of herself in every line! Not the faintest sign of a lingering spark of tenderness—not one allusion to *her* disappointment! Was this only to cover the depth of his own heart-ache, or had he, in two days' struggle, been able to crush all vestiges of a hopeless passion? Her hand trembled as she held the note, and a change passed over her countenance which did not escape her quick-eyed sister.

“ Oh, Milicent, dear! it disappoints you very much. But need I mind him? Just let me go with you all the same, and don't let us care what he says. It will be time enough for you to mind him when you are married and must obey.”

Lady Milicent put out her hand to

silence the light-hearted speaker. "Come here, my dear little sister, and let me say a few solemn words of confidence in your secret ear. Do not ever again, darling, speak of my marrying Mr. Basil-Leigh. Indeed, I have resolved never to marry anyone; but there are special reasons why it is very painful for me to hear jesting upon this subject; reasons why Mr. Basil-Leigh will never come to Daneshurst, except upon business respecting your affairs. I wish to get used to this thought that I may make other duties in life, and that is why I propose going away from this place for a short time, although it is very hard for me to leave the dear old home, even for a few months, but I cannot leave my little May."

"Oh, sister! oh, Milicent, I am so sorry!" and she clasped her sister, kissing her fondly again and again. "I shall not mind in the least what Mr.— what

he says, and I will tell Madame that I promised papa to do everything *you* said, and papa only said anything at all about Mr. Basil-Leigh, because he thought—because we all thought—but no matter. We shall go to Paris, and Italy, and Switzerland, and, sister, there are lots and lots of nice gentlemen, even princes and dukes who would be so glad to marry—my—beautiful—sister,” a kiss emphasized each word, “and after all it seemed funny always to think of a real Baroness marrying— but—oh—I—forgot,” there were more emphatic kisses, “but shall we not start to-morrow all the same?”

“I hope so, little pet. But tell me exactly what you wrote to—to—Mr.—to your guardian.”

“Oh! I wrote just what Madame dictated, that you were going abroad and wished to take me, and I wanted to know if he, as my guardian, had any objection. It was but a wee-wee note, mine was.

Madame sent it inside of hers, which was very long, and she did not tell me what she said."

"I imagine not," rejoined the sister sadly, who began to perceive there were good grounds for her secret aversion to the intrusive dame.

"I will see my solicitor this afternoon and have his opinion as to your going. You will drive with me, darling, for there will be a few matters for us to arrange, and a parting visit or two to make."

The impulsive child seized her sister again and was covering her face and neck with kisses, when they both became aware of Madame's presence in the room and her quiet contemplation of the affectionate display. She was not to leave Daneshurst until that night, and was performing all her usual duties. She was waiting at that moment all equipped for the ordinary afternoon walk with her pupil, and gently reminded May that she

had been patiently expecting her for some time.

Mabel clung to Lady Milicent, who coldly told Madame there was no necessity for detaining her; that her sister would drive with her that afternoon, and remain with her until bedtime. Madame left the room in silence, foiled in greater things than walking out with her pupil. Lady Milicent caught the look which was cast at her as Madame turned away; there was something in that look she could never exclude from her thoughts whenever after they reverted to the banished governess.

The day was spent as proposed. The counsellor quite sustained Lady Milicent's view of her rights. Two days later the sisters were safe in Paris.

It must be confessed that Lady Milicent did not breathe freely until safe upon French soil. The fear of a *habeas corpus* writ pursued her, until she laughed at her own weakness and folly, and acknowledged

that even her strong nerves and frame had suffered from the tension by which they had been tried too long.

Madame Grillet felt that her vocation was ended, when Lady Milicent deprived her of her afternoon walk, and the "earliest convenience" she had been requested to consult, proved to be the very evening of her rebuff. Baffled and chagrined, she cared not to linger to see her wishes thwarted, and speedily took leave of Daneshurst with a year's advanced salary in her pocket, and a general protest against injustice and misunderstanding in her manner, yet quiet and dignified in her disappointment to an extent that gave Lady Milicent one passing qualm of conscience, lest after all she had done injustice to the plausibly spoken dame. Positively declining the proffered coach to carry her and her single box to her next abiding place, she despatched her luggage by a porter to an address in

Bertsford, while she alone and on foot followed the lonely road to Westmeath, and not late in the evening was housed at Rook's Dene, in a fashion to prove her no stranger there.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EVENING IN THE ORATORY.

"Are the gates made sure?
Is every bolt made fast?
Dare we breathe calm? and unalarmed forecast
Our calls to suffer or to do?"



CECILE was not much comforted by the note she received from her cousin the day following her unsatisfactory visit, for she saw in it a confirmation of her worst fears, and read a great deal more than was absolutely written in the few lines. Neither did Cecile derive

much satisfaction from her confidence to Mr. Harewood, who arrived at Rook's Dene an hour or two after the missive from Lady Milicent. He had come to take leave, previous to a short absence in Devon, and it was not long before he had to listen to Cecile's fears and suspicions, especially suggested by the mysterious apparitions in the little octagon.

He laughed heartily at his timid fiancée, after having made with her a visit of inspection to the mysterious chapel, which he found sufficiently uninteresting. As for Mr. Basil-Leigh, he could not see why he should not mingle freely with men whom he so much resembled as to revive the old adage that "birds of a feather, flock together." He bade Cecile think of herself and of him, and thus expedite the arrangements which should enable him to transfer her from the influences that took such mysterious shape to her mind's eye. If Lady Milicent and her ritualistic ad-

mirer chose to enact the part of Abelard and Heloise, as every one believed they would do sooner or later, it was doubtless their happiness to do so, and it need not distress Cecile. At any rate, Harewood begged a short probation for himself, and the second day after the visit to Daneshurst he secured the promise he sought, the little lady consenting to fix the wedding day, which should be immediately after Christmas, that they might have a good part of the winter left for a wedding trip beneath bright skies and in rambles through Italy.

Within an hour of this climax to his hopes, Harewood took leave, starting for Devon, where his family dwelt, and where a home was already being prepared for Cecile.

Light of heart and gay of step when she had closed the postern gate, her usual parting place with the happy man, she turned homeward. She felt bright

and happy and strong enough in spirit to tell her mother immediately the decision at which they had arrived; that the wedding-day was absolutely fixed. Unfortunately she was diverted from the direct path by some trifle, and an unhappy inspiration directed her steps again to the grove that encircled the octagonal mystery, which of late had possessed a resistless attraction for her.

Twilight was closing in, but she felt no timidity, for still under the spell of her lover's practical solution of her vexing problem, she clung no longer to the marvellous in explaining the apparition; the structure therefore had lost its romantic character to her, and stood grey and cold in the dim shade. Unhappily too, the door stood invitingly open, and she was just in the mood which would find tender expression in the dulciana notes of the sweet organ. She had been rather pressed of late to use the instrument fre-

quently. So she went in, drawing the curtain screen closely around her, had opened the organ and was removing her gloves, when she became aware of approaching steps. She started to listen as her fears revived, while in the instant's hesitation whether she should fly outside or retain her place in ambush, she heard a grating sound, and a startling sight appeared to her terrified eyes. The exquisite picture before which she had often lingered in admiration slowly disappeared, gliding gradually upward like a heavy window-sash in its grooves. The picture was speedily replaced by the head of a living man whose body shortly followed. She recognized in these at once the friar of Foligno. He leaped irreverently over the altar, quickly closed and locked the door by which she had entered, drawing the blinds and lighting the gas before he gave a certain signal. Others then came in as he had entered. There

were perhaps not more than a dozen, but to Cecile they seemed legion, as they took their places in the room. Some knelt low before the tiny altar, others merely bent the knee, but all crossed themselves before settling down to business. The altar-piece was not slid back to its place, but the curtain which usually protected the picture was drawn before the opening.

The poor girl crouched in numbness of terror, which our pen need not attempt to describe. In one moment she could scarcely restrain herself from dashing forward to reveal her presence, and tell them what untimely accident had brought her there—in the next, she was in an agony of fright, lest by some uncontrollable movement she should betray herself. Now a hysterical desire to shriek seized her; then an attempt to hold her very breath lest the pulsation of her heart should be detected. She laboured to hear nothing, and then in infatuated despair strained

to catch even a whispered word. Would madness or even death, she asked herself, close the fearful chapter? Or did disgrace await her, with penalties awful and crushing but not to be defined, as the terrible expiation that those men would demand! It was not long before she was quite satisfied they were capable of inflicting any retribution, and in the calm of utter despair she resigned herself to her fate, fully convinced if she were discovered she would never be in a position to reveal the stories which had come to her ears.

But as the hours sped on, and more than one familiar voice was heard in speech; when names, sacred to her heart, were lightly bandied from lip to lip, when her cousin's fearful sorrow and vast humiliation were represented as a necessary sacrifice, when her own infidel self was described as not worth looking after; when scheme after scheme for the ex-

tension of a corrupt and lying system was laid bare; when a plot diabolic in its conception, boundless in craft and intrigue, assailing the home and happiness of those she loved, was discussed with a cold, heartless insensibility to the affections to be violated, or duty misinterpreted; she lost by degrees all consciousness of her own perilous position, and fervently prayed God to grant her a few days more of life and liberty, that she with her own weak hand might wield the weapon of defence she now possessed to foil their infernal designs. If God would only grant her two brief minutes at her cousin's side, she would ask no more of life.

The conspirators sat long in council. She knew the hours were growing late, that already the family must be at dinner and she would be missed. But self was quite forgotten, for while her blood seemed to stagnate, it was not in personal fear, but at the monstrous revelation which had come

to her, and from an overwhelming dread lest she should not be spared to stay the desolating arm already lifted against the dear ones at Daneshurst. But she was soon to test the temper of the enemy. To her unspeakable dismay, she heard, with the pleasant intimation of adjournment, a request that a litany should be sung, and Mr. Basil-Leigh was asked to accompany the chant upon the organ.

Would the kindly earth open to cover her, or an avenging Heaven intervene to save her, was her thought in that instant of suspense, which was her last of concealment, for in the next the screen was drawn aside and the poor trembling culprit unveiled. It was no gentle or chivalrous hand that dragged her from her hiding-place.

“Here is a high-minded, honourable young woman!” broke forth Mr. Basil-Leigh, as he thrust her from him.

Cecile's self-possession was instantly restored.

"It becomes you, Mr. Basil-Leigh, to speak of honour and high-mindedness," she exclaimed, as she turned in ineffable scorn from him towards Foligno. "I came innocently here to practise, in perfect ignorance of the uses to which this place is devoted, with no idea of eves-dropping or listening—to speak plainly, never dreaming that some of the appliances of the Inquisition are still in force. I was surprised by your entrance, and without suspicion of what was to follow, yielded to a wrong impulse to remain, rather than encounter the disagreeableness of facing you, and thus reveal the fact that I had discovered your secret entrance."

"A truly honourable woman could not have hesitated an instant," interrupted Basil-Leigh.

"Sir," you are incapable of defining

anything honourable, and I decline to listen to you," and again addressing the Italian, she repeated minutely the explanation she had already given.

"There is no evading the fact, Miss Fayne," replied Foligno, "that you are convicted of a most guilty and dishonourable act of eves-dropping. Nothing can justify your remaining hidden one moment after our entrance. As for your discovery of our sheltered approach to the chapel, I cannot see how that should have troubled you, it being altogether our business. We would all have acted like gentlemen towards you, and promptly accepted your explanation. You have now dishonestly possessed yourself of information which it is not for our advantage to have circulated. It is of no great consequence, except that it obliges us to change some of our tactics, that is all." He spoke in the blandest tones, apparently in undisturbed quiet of mind, as

he continued, "In fact, my dear young lady, you scarcely comprehend how far you are compromised if this matter becomes public. You are a spy in the enemy's camp, and you know what discovery under those circumstances implies. It is not our policy, however, to hang our foes, but we are forced to require certain pledges of you. Common courtesy, if nothing else, I am sure will induce you to grant these and if this information which you have acquired was really unsought, you will not object to act as if you had never gained possession of it."

He knew her well, and felt sure if she promised silence, either verbally or in writing, they had nothing to fear. He perceived very quickly, however, that there was nothing of the kind to hope for, and as soon changed his own tone. The sweet bland smile vanished into a stern interrogatory.

“You decline, Miss Fayne, to give us this assurance?”

Cecile trembled in every limb, but she seemed gifted with superhuman strength.

“I repeat, gentlemen,” she said firmly, “that my presence here was altogether unpremeditated—I had no intention of becoming a spy. I know that I am quite at your mercy, but that does not prevent my declining to give any pledges which would make me even an involuntary accomplice in the heinous acts you contemplate. Their very mention has filled me with horror. You need not tell me that I am in your power. I know that; you can do as well with me as you have done with others, whatever your mistaken sense of duty may think necessary. You can enclose me helplessly in the mysterious chamber beneath your altar; you can carry Joseph’s coat of many colours to the few who would miss me from this bright earth, and mourn

that I had fallen a prey to any violence. You can torture, you can do many things to rob life of joy and poison every thought of liberty ; but it is only the poor frail body you can harm, and the human feelings you can torture. The conscience and the soul, my friends, you cannot touch ! You cannot rule me here !” she said, touching her breast and looking up, seemed even in their misguided eyes, with her sweet innocent face, richly crowned with the golden hair, like one of the early martyrs upon whose pictured loveliness they were wont to dwell. “ God overrules all these things,” she said after a moment’s thought, “ we are often made involuntary instruments of His service, and witnesses to His great care and love.”

“ Miss Fayne, there is no occasion for heroics ; you are not called upon to be a martyr,” said the devoted incumbent of St. Alphege, hitherto a silent

and shrinking observer. "We only ask you to yield to the dictates of common courtesy, which we are ready to honour at your hands. Be assured if you betray the confidence of this assembly, you recklessly assume a fearful responsibility, and impede a good work which is glorifying God and saving souls."

"Miss Fayne cannot be permitted to betray the confidence of this assembly," interposed Mr. Basil-Leigh.

Cecile cast a withering look at Basil-Leigh, and turned sharply to the other speaker.

"My nature recoils, Mr. Noel, from parleying with traitors. Is God ever glorified in lying and wrong, in perjury and theft? Are souls saved when the wolf puts on the shepherd's garb and comes with honeyed words to beguile the unsuspecting—to lure them where they are lost without defence or voice of hope? There are some within this

small temple dedicated to an unknown God—not to the Christian's God and Saviour," and she looked pityingly at the incumbents, "with whom my faith has nothing in common, and of whom I ask nothing; but to you, M. di Foligno, I look for release from my unhappy position. Take me to my mother; she will believe at least in my innocence, although I can give no pledges, and make no promises which in God's sight would rank me with evil-doers."

"Such taunts are rather out of place, Miss Fayne. If you seek mercy at our hands, it would perhaps be wiser not to arouse a spirit you may not find so easy to allay again. We quite believe your presence here unpremeditated, and we perceive that your position is very painful, but we are not responsible for the one or the other. At the same time our own position is also painful, and vast interests are in jeopardy. We cannot therefore release you

without receiving some assurance, such as any high principled, honourable woman would give, that no bad use will be made of information thus obtained by stealth."

"You ask me," she replied calmly, "to be false to your own principles. Is it not your own practice to get by stealth and to work by strategy? No, M. di Foligno, I will give no pledge. I will make no promise. That I am a lady, defenceless and unprotected, should be enough to ensure my speedy deliverance from this embarrassing situation. If I have violated any law of the land, you have your remedy. M. di Foligno, will you allow me to retire?"

They all regarded the transformed girl with silent amazement. None moved toward the door, no one, in fact, being quite sure what was to be done. Cecile who knew the room better than they supposed, stood quietly for a moment, then asked again if any gentleman would open

the door of release. Another interval of silence, when Cecile sprang quickly forward and gave a vigorous pull at the bell-handle, which, it may be remembered a few days before, she had rung at her mother's request. To the utter consternation of the discomfited councillors, a long continued ringing brought them to their feet, and before the bell was answered by one of the house servants, the Council of Ten had vanished by the way they came, leaving the terrified girl securely locked in the room, worse to her than a spectral chamber.

In vain she tried to draw the bolts and force the brass-bound door, while some one outside was as industriously at work to get in. The key, unhappily, was in Foligno's pocket. Cecile had no little difficulty in explaining that it was Miss Cecile Fayne asking to be let out. After a delay which seemed interminable, with much running to and fro, the door was

finally unlocked by Lady di Spagna. Her countenance gave the poor girl very little to expect of justice or mercy.

“Go to your room, you wicked, deceitful child. Caught happily in your own snares this time. Lost as you are to self-respect and common honour, go where pure eyes will not be offended by you.”

What more might have been said to the unhappy culprit, it is impossible to imagine, if, at that stage of proceedings, by the merest accident, Father Ambroise had not appeared. His astonishment was very great at what he saw, and he very naturally wanted explanations. His arrival was a more welcome sight to Cecile than to her mother, for as Lady Ethel had once admitted, he was not of her counsel. Cecile sprang toward him crying,

“Oh! brother, will you not listen to me? Will you not protect me? I know

that I did wrong to stay, but it was quite unpremeditated."

"My dear Cecile, of course I will protect you, if you need protection. But what have you done? Is it such a grievous sin to go into mamma's oratory? I supposed the gardener had locked you in, what is the truth?"

"Oh worse than that, Ambroise. I went in to play the organ and I overheard——"

"Cecile!" shouted her mother, "are you lost to all sense of decency! Not one word of this to your brother or any human being, if you do not wish to bring ruin upon yourself."

"Nay, Lady di Spagna," insisted the priest. "I must know what this means. Cecile is in a tumult of feeling. Suffer her to tell me all she would."

"Well, then, Ambroise, if you will know," replied the lady in a hissing whisper, "let her tell you, that she has

been discovered in the Oratory under circumstances which will be the ruin of her character if they transpire. For my sake, if not for the unhappy girl's, I pray there may be nothing more said of this disgraceful revelation."

"Oh! mamma, mamma!" moaned the poor victim, as Lady Ethel turned away as if to hide her tears of shame, while Father Ambroise dropped the hand he had taken in tender sympathy, and Cecile walked toward the house where she felt she had no longer either a home or protection.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOILS AND COUNTERFOILS.



It can well be imagined that Cecile experienced no desire to linger in the dining-room, or accept the fragments of a dinner that had been put aside for her.

Feeling that she was on the verge of an engulfing chasm, she resigned herself to whatever might await her, and sought the solitude of her chamber in a state of mind altogether novel in her experience.

For awhile, the sense of the insult she had received from her mother overcame all other emotions ; but gradually a vivid sense of her own hazardous position, and the necessity for prompt action pressed upon her, rousing her to consider what course to pursue. Suddenly, as if by miracle, she seemed transformed into a brave heroic woman, and was herself startled by the contemplation of the change. The trembling timid girl was lost in the rush of recollections which crowded themselves before her, as she recalled the hideous things she had heard before she was discovered. She could not avoid the conviction that her own personal liberty was threatened, and this only strengthened her to do with promptitude anything that was to be done. In fact, she was not at all sure that even at that moment she could freely control her own movements, while it was more than probable that to-morrow would find her hope-

lessly disabled. She was in the power of the unscrupulous, of whose terrible capabilities she had had recent evidence. Like one in a dream, she paced her room in bewildered efforts to find the clue out of the maze into which she had been led. Meanwhile the hum of conversation below came to her in muffled sounds. She bolted her door and closely drew the curtains before the windows, stirring up the fire, and lighting the candles, as if preparing to do some heavy work which needed light and cheer. An hour of inaction passed, during which she either walked the room in deep thought, or sat studying the ruddy embers as if to find inspiration there. Finally, with one long-drawn sigh, she murmured, "Oh, God of Infinite mercy, strengthen me—guide me, and if it be Thy will, protect me from bodily harm! Let Thy will, not mine, be done!"

Had an eye of evil been gazing unseen upon that uplifted saintly face, its pure

angelic beauty would have turned aside the threatened ill. With the outspoken prayer she fell upon her knees and buried her face upon her bed. Thus kneeling she prayed until, choked in her sorrow, words failed her, and the simple child-like *kyrie* went forth in sobs. When the supplication ceased, her tears flowed no longer, sobs no more convulsed, and she arose with the assurance that an angel was at her side. She then opened her writing-desk, and deliberately wrote two letters, neither of them very long, but both carefully studied and worded. They were twice read before she closed them. Then she quietly seated herself by the fire, patiently awaiting that perfect calm in the house which follows much bolting and barring, dying away of footsteps, and the faint sound of voices. One after another the members of the household retired to their rooms, and the hush of midnight fell upon the house.

Cecile had resolved to open her door to no one that night, and her resolve was speedily tested. The clock had struck the half-hour after twelve when she heard her mother's footstep, almost cat-like in its noiselessness; but Cecile knew it too well. The door was gently tried, once, twice, and her mother's voice was heard.

"Cecile, are you in bed? I must speak with you."

"Not to-night, please, mamma; I am not able to talk to-night. Please wait until morning, and I will hear all you have to say," replied Cecile, without opening her door.

"I have not much to say, but must say that to-night. Do not force me to violence; unlock your door!"

"I hear you perfectly, mamma; but I am really too wretched to see any one to-night."

"Is there anyone with you, miserable girl, that you refuse to admit me, causing

further scandal. This is rebellion I will not brook in my own house! I command you to open the door, or in five minutes it will be forced."

Cecile drew back the bolts, and stood before her mother the very picture of the wretchedness she had pleaded, yet calm and dignified. She stepped aside as her mother pushed by, saying in a voice which would have conquered any but a heart of fanaticism,

"Mamma, I have suffered too much to endure any talk to-night. I can neither listen nor reply. Perhaps in the morning I will be able to prove to you the bitter injustice of the charge which has well-nigh broken my heart. In the name of a mother's love, have pity on me, and leave me to-night. My brain reels now, and I can support no more. I am half-mad already! Oh, mamma!"

"More than *half*, I should think. There would be very little difficulty in proving

you quite demented ; but whether your brain reels or not, you have to listen to me, and to-night. Where your mad fancies may lead you to-morrow, the daylight will prove, and——”

“ No, no, mamma ; I cannot suffer more to-night ! Would you kill me ? I promise to go dutifully to you in the morning and talk quietly over the wretched business if you will spare me to-night. I have no longer the faculty of listening. I do not know what is real and what imaginary. A few hours' sleep will make me all right ; but, oh, mamma ! do leave me now !”

Lady Ethel yielded, but made her own conditions, that Cecile should see her at an early hour before she had talked with anyone. “ If you will promise this sacredly, and come to me at nine o'clock, I relent.”

“ I promise, mamma, to open my lips to no human being upon this subject until

we have talked over the matter together. I am sure that I can convince you of my innocence."

Lady Ethel departed, after having closely scanned Cecile's dressing-table, writing-desk, and the pretty little decorations of her room generally. Nothing told tales, and all trace of the occupation of the earlier hours of the evening was hidden from the suspicious eyes. The door was again closed and bolted, the fire brightened, and, without undressing, Cecile threw herself upon her bed. The church clock struck one. "Two hours for rest, and to regain my courage," she said, with a shudder, as she lay down.

She did not sleep. The great clock told the hours off by quarters, in musical chimes. Cecile lay quiet, pressing her aching head upon a heated pillow until the intense silence of the night was broken by the three heavy strokes which told her that her two hours rest was over. The

poor girl arose, and knelt again for a few minutes in unuttered prayer and supplication for Heaven's protecting mercy. A small prayer-book—her father's legacy, with a few souvenirs and letters from her cousin and Harewood, were hidden in her bosom. She wrapped herself in shawl and hood, extinguished her candle, took off her slippers, and with unshod feet glided from the room. Noiselessly as a shadow she went through the long corridor which led to the servants' stairway. Bars were taken quietly down and the lock turned, and she found herself out in the clear cold winter's night, which was quite dark, notwithstanding the myriads of stars sparkling overhead.

A bright light was burning in her mother's room, and a well-defined shadow upon the blind told her there was a wakeful watcher there. She fled like a frightened doe across the lawn and through dark groves to the postern gate, of which

she kept a key. She passed the haunted oratory, and there too she fancied there were lights and moving shadows. She kept off gravel-walks and avoided the places where dogs were kennelled and set to watch, until gaining the broad deserted highway, she almost flew upon her strange errand. A quarter of a mile still lay between her and a friendly letter-box, which was left open all night to receive belated missives which the early postman gathered for morning distribution in the town. That spot once reached, she cared not what might happen. But her powers were failing; like one in some dreadful dream, she seemed to make no speed. Meanwhile, nearer and nearer came a pursuing step, gaining upon her every instant, increasing in rapidity as her own powers flagged, until, when, within a hundred yards of the destined goal, her arm was seized by a strong hand.

“Miss Fayne! Miss Cecile!” gasped a

breathless lacquey, "Lady di Spagna sent me to bring you home."

"In one minute, good Lorenzo, it is but a step further that I am going, and then I will return with you." Breathless as he, she sought to move on. "Come with me to the letter-box."

"Nay, Miss Fayne, I dare not go another inch."

"Well, then, wait an instant here," trying to shake off the heavy hand.

"My orders, Miss, be very positive, on no account must I let you go down that street."

"Lorenzo, my good Lorenzo, there is life and death at stake, and gold, hundreds for you, if you will yield. You will just wait here, I will run back so quickly," and she dashed away his arm. The man was quite convinced by this time that Lady di Spagna's fears were not groundless, and that his beautiful young mistress had lost her senses entirely.

“No, no! Miss. I would not go there if I were you. It is a dangerous road in this darkness. Come now, Miss, no one will hurt you, only come back quietly. The carriage will soon meet us. Just think how it looks for a young lady to be running the streets alone here after three o'clock in the morning. Come along, Miss Cecile, the mistress will be quite out of *her* head too!”

“Lorenzo, I am perfectly sane and not at all out of my head. I cannot allow you thus to obstruct my way. Take your hands off me, and dare not prevent my going on!”

The man was half awed. “Give me your letter, Miss Fayne, I promise you to put it safely in the bag in time for the morning post.”

“Thank you, Lorenzo, but the letters must be posted with my own hands. I tell you there is little short of life and death at stake; and will you blunder on when I

tell you the truth? Do not touch me again !”

At that moment the unusual sound of a rapidly approaching vehicle and the murmur of voices in the quiet street began to attract attention. Here and there a head was visible at an open window. Two figures came from the road down which Cecile had flown, while the town policeman with his lantern, quickened his deliberate step, as he perceived what he took to be an altercation between a man and woman in some street fray. As he reached the spot, the two pedestrians also arrived. These proved to be Father Ambroise with the chapel verger, on his way to administer the last rites of his church to some unexpectedly summoned soul, *in extremis*. The general astonishment can be but feebly described.

“What is the meaning of this row?” gruffly asked the officer of the peace, lay-

ing his hand, now not gently upon the servant's shoulder.

"It is my poor young mistress escaped," Lorenzo answered in a low voice, significantly touching his forehead, "and Lady—my mistress, has sent me to bring the young lady back, for happily they missed her immediately. She objects to go back until she has been to the post-office yonder."

"Why hinder her then, if that will pacify her? It won't take ten minutes both ways," replied the policeman, with a ready common-sense, "only don't stop here making a brawl and disturbing the neighbourhood."

Poor Cecile had shrunk back in hopeless despair, undecided whether to dash away to the inviting place, or throw herself upon the officer's protection, when she recognized her step-brother. She had an instinctive and wonderful faith in his honesty and high principles, despite

her general distrust of Romish priests. This faith now prompted her to cast herself upon his protection rather than the officer's, and she sprang toward him.

"Cecile! In Heaven's name, my sister, what does this mean? How is it I find you here at this unseasonable hour?"

"Brother, will you not protect me? I know that I am altogether in a false position, but God knows that I am innocent of all that is wrong. Ambroise, He will for ever bless you, if you will aid me this once. You see these letters, they contain matter vital to those I love. To post them I have stolen out alone. This servant pursues me and stops my way just as I am within sight of the office."

He looked incredulously, even severely at her. She wrung her hands as she realized how improbable her story seemed to the small group of listeners.

"Why must you steal out at this hour to post your letters? Why could you not

have put them in the bag with the others? You gain no time in this. Let me see them," he said sternly. He read by the light of the policeman's lantern their legible addresses. One was for the Baroness Leycour, the other for her own betrothed. "Surely, Cecile, there need be no mystery in writing to these persons. I cannot understand it. You ought to know how ruinous all this is to your reputation, however innocent your intentions may be. Go on to the post office if you please; but, better still, turn homeward and do as you ever have done with your letters. Unhappily I am already lingering too long on my mission to the dying, otherwise I would escort you home myself."

Meanwhile the servant, by coughs and dumb signs, had attracted the priest's attention, and unperceived by Cecile had conveyed to him the intimation he had already given to the policeman. Taking


quickly the cue, Father Ambroise's manner instantly relented ; he looked tenderly at her.

“ My poor, unhappy sister ! confide your letters to me. I will take care that they reach their destination.” He took her icy cold hand and tried to warm it. “ Take her into my study, Lorenzo, there is fire still burning, and go at once for her mother. I must go on,” and he hastened on his errand of mercy.

Without a suspicion of what had softened his tone, she confided her precious letters to him in perfect faith, just as one of the carriages from Rook's Dene came dashing down the street to the consternation of the awakened villagers, and into it, a moment later, Cecile was handed by the servant, who, instead of mounting upon the coach-box as usual, took his seat within, and the coach was soon out of sight of the curious spectators.

CHAPTER XV.

A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE.

A decorative initial letter 'T' in a blackletter style, surrounded by intricate floral and vine patterns. At the base of the 'T', there is a small illustration of a woman in a long, flowing dress, possibly a saint or a figure of religious significance, standing on a small platform.

THE long and anxious hours, which we have tarried with Cecile as they pressed heavily upon mind and body, were not moments of tranquil reflection to the disconcerted group so rudely scattered by the involuntary eaves-dropper. A general sense of uncertainty and disquiet took possession of each individual, for each was in some distinct, particular manner, menaced by the power which an

unfriendly party had gained. To Basil Leigh and his fellow-worker especially, did the situation seem desperate, and it can be believed that fears of a personal and private nature mingled not a little with unfeigned anxiety lest the good and prospering cause should be brought to disgrace, if not to legal exposure and punishment.

Foligno alone seemed to retain his usual self-possession. With larger experience of life and men, and a deeper insight into the mysteries he preached, he was inclined to make light of the annoying circumstances. He suggested, not blindly, that the power to prevent any mischief to themselves or their cause was quite in their own hands; but that it involved some disagreeable measures, and, most unhappily, the heaviest and sorest demands upon Lady di Spagna's faith and obedience. This lady was a chief feature in the anxious group. Her own folly had been

perhaps the primal cause of the disaster, for it was quite her own scheme to convert an innocent summer-house into a chamber of conspiracy and secret assemblies.

Now that experience had proved it, everyone appreciated how great a risk they had always run, while they felt themselves securely barred against intrusion. But then, they did not reflect that the atmosphere of mystery would not have added dramatic interest to their secret councils, had they been held in a quiet room, where it was perfectly natural they should meet, and quite impossible for such a catastrophe as they now recalled to have taken place. But the past was a fact not to be changed, and must be so dealt with. Their immediate business, therefore, was with the present, and thus to take care of the future. Foligno did not hesitate to say boldly that everything now depended upon Lady Ethel. Was she

equal to the sacrifice she was now called upon to make, a double sacrifice in fact, for it embraced both her daughter and herself. Her anxious face too clearly betrayed her agitated mind. She knew too well that she was in a master's hands, and rebellion would be folly and useless. Better then, she thought, make a virtue of the necessity that controlled her. If her heart, however, had been laid bare before the relentless master, he would have found no ready and yearning spirit of martyrdom; not that its absence would have made any difference in his view of her destiny.

The struggle with her was brief, but bitter. The conflict of feelings was never betrayed. There were still some lingering throbs of maternal love, which sharpened her anguish of mind and diverted her reflections from the personal sacrifice she plainly saw was demanded of her. She was not permitted to choose

between the reprobate child and the work to which she had vowed herself. She knew full well there was never a question as to the insignificance of any fate which might be in store for her misguided child, when compared with the terrible risks to which she had exposed the band. The only matter for consideration was the form of sacrifice by which the object would be best accomplished.

After the first bitter outcry of the spirit and shrinking of the flesh, the submissive mother exclaimed, "Whosoever loveth child or lands better than me is not worthy of me." There was perfect resignation in the cry.

Be it fanaticism, misdirected zeal, superstition, or priest-ridden subjection, we cannot but testify to the devotion and sincerity of a faith which could thus respond, and take for its example the Father of the faithful, following the unresisting

sacrifice as it were to Moriah's mount, yet without the assurance that the sacrificing knife should at the last instant be stayed, while God provided the redeeming offering.

The cautious and methodical Foligno, who took the leadership, probed the mother's faith. He represented the necessity of immediate action in the urgency of the circumstances.

"By to-morrow night," he said, "if we do not use our power to prevent the disclosures of this evening being revealed, they will be spreading in all directions of the land. There is not one hour to be lost of surveillance and sure prevention. Cecile must have no communication with the outside world, by writing or word of mouth. She cannot be made to promise, or we should still be secure. It is impossible to confine her within this house, upon any pretext which would be accepted. A scandal would be inevitable. What

are your own ideas and suggestions, Lady di Spagna?"

Lady Ethel, wrapped in gloom and filled with melancholy forebodings, seemed quite incapable of forming any ideas or making any suggestions. For the first time called upon to do anything which demanded a real sacrifice, she felt her own helplessness. Her natural aptitude for scheming could not serve her in this dilemma, and there seemed but a hard straight road before her, while she doubted her strength to carry her up its rugged height. Her ready tact had forsaken her, and the qualities which had always made her a valuable member of that small band of propagandists, were not those for the present emergency.

"What can I do? What must I do? Instruct me and I will obey!" she exclaimed in tearless grief, wringing her hands and groaning in spirit. "My poor Cecile! my unhappy child! ever so gentle

and obedient in everything but religion. So cold and weak in that. So misguided and unbelieving! But how can I, her mother, deliberately wreck her hopes and blight her earthly happiness, so lovely, so gentle as she is? How can I do this, even for righteousness' sake?"

Even the automatic Jesuit was moved by the sincerity of her grief, and, if it were possible, one single note of pity mingled with the solemn tones of his awful charge.

"My dear Lady di Spagna, we sincerely sympathize with your sorrow over this recreant child, but it need not be sorrow without hope. Let us pray to God that this wretched climax of her life may be the first link in a chain of circumstances that will draw her within the Holy Church, in bringing her under influences which even she will scarcely resist. But," he assumed a confidential manner, "I have not, for a long time

regarded Miss Fayne as quite responsible for her peculiar ways. Tell me frankly now," he almost whispered, and his words came with a hissing emphasis, "*Is your daughter quite sane?*"

Lady Ethel shuddered and blanched. She understood the length and breadth of that ominous question.

For a long, sad minute, she could make no response. Then the almost inaudible answer was a gasped, "*Perhaps not.*"

"If that be so," he replied, with painful promptness, "the trouble is readily disposed of, for she decidedly needs watching and the closest keeping. Neither is there anyone, who, so tenderly to her, or so faithfully to the cause, which in her madness she might damage, can guard and protect her as yourself. Have you strength and faith for this? Can you relinquish your position, your labours among us, resigning perhaps comfort and ease, incurring certainly privations and

countless anxieties ; assuming responsibilities to call forth all your talent and tact, until—we cannot say how long, but until the monomania be cured or be proved incurable ?”

A longer silence, in which the pulsations of every breast could almost be heard, and then came a sobbing, broken-hearted assent.

“ The Holy Mother will aid me ; a sword pierced her bosom too. The blessed saints and martyrs will sustain me. I see my work, and—you can count upon me.” A bitter fit of weeping seized her, and a low murmur of approval mingled with the sobs that were tearing one breast of anguish. Foligno turned towards her, unmoved apparently, but his voice was low and gentle as he said,

“ God and the saints ever bless you, my daughter. Think not of yourself as outcast from us. By this costly sacrifice the salvation of your land may be

achieved. If Cecile's heedlessness and folly could damage our cause for ever here, her mother's faith can save us."

Not every one knew the magnitude of the work she thus assumed, but all knew that by some untold sacrifice of mother and child, their secrets would be guarded and the revelations prevented. The matter was then discussed in its practical details. A general impression prevailed that Cecile would endeavour to escape from the house that night. To prevent this, and the possibility of her mailing any letters must be the present care.

The adjourned council was held in the library, and the servants were still at their posts, so that up to that time there was no danger of her having taken flight. We have seen Lady Ethel's midnight visit to the culprit. The result of her observation was not encouraging, and strengthened the conviction that a clandestine escape was meditated.

A rigid watch was accordingly set; a carriage was made ready, and a "trusty" driver awaited the call of the lady, whose preparations were quickly completed that she might start at a minute's notice upon a mission uncertain in duration and undefined in form.

Lorenzo, the credulous and not over-bright Italian footman, was detained from his slumbers, and as he knew nothing of the dénouement of the early evening, he was easily persuaded by the apparently heart-broken mother that his fair young mistress had quite lost her mind in the course of religious anxieties and inquiries. He took his place in ambush as directed, and watched with the unreasoning fidelity of a mastiff—his devotion, doubtless, intensified by the bribe of bright yellow pieces which already had glittered in his palm, not to speak of the promise of a far richer golden harvest, if he should prevent his young lady coming to any

harm. He was merely to follow her steps if she only wandered through the grounds, but if she went outside of the gates she must be brought back; at any cost she must be intercepted if she sought the dark steep lane where the post-office had been planted, because at the foot of that road there was a deep black stream, where he was persuaded to believe the poor girl proposed to seek a Lethe in which to drown her pursuing doubts and apprehensions of evil. He was, in fact, to alarm Lady di Spagna by a certain signal if Miss Fayne left her room, and then follow the directions he had received.

As we have seen, he obeyed instructions to the very letter. Cecile was not allowed to enter the dark and slippery road at whose foot the kindly stream went rushing by; not even was she permitted to descend the narrow way for the few steps which would have led her to the coveted goal. As the unconscious victim glided

from the house, a pursuing shadow followed. Lady di Spagna, having recognized the signal, was almost as soon ready to mount the carriage well filled with rugs and shawls, and start to the rescue. Hidden in the deepest corner in darkness, beneath a pile of coverings she sat motionless when Cecile was handed in by the unreluctant Lorenzo, to whom the hours of vigil had been long and the night air chill.

Contrary to Cecile's expectations, upon discovering her mother she was greeted by no reproaches, but was more than astonished at the unwonted tenderness with which she was enveloped in a cloak and other wraps, and was deeply affected by the paroxysm of tears with which her mother clasped her to her breast. In fact she suddenly felt herself a very miserable sinner, quite ready to ask forgiveness for having heedlessly caused so much trouble, and even to give any pledges not

to betray the secret councils of which she had become the involuntary receptacle, when Lady di Spagna in sobs and broken accents turned to the man-servant, and told him, there was no further necessity for him inside the coach, there was "no danger of Miss Fayne becoming violent." The man promptly took his seat outside. Cecile remarked, at the same time, that her mother secured possession of the check-string. She broke the silence, not precisely in the tender mood of the earlier minutes.

"Surely, mamma, I cannot understand why you should say that to Lorenzo. I do not know what you mean. How could I be violent to you? Do let me tell you how sorry I am for what has happened, and to assure you that you have nothing to apprehend. Will you not forgive me, and believe that it pains me sorely to have annoyed you so very much?" She sought to throw her arms

around her mother, which was suffered in perfect silence.

In truth, the mother's heart was half-failing, and if she had dared, upon the strength of Cecile's assurance, she would gladly have turned homeward and deposited the penitent child in the warm bed for which her aching head and shivering limbs were pleading. But it was too late to go back; her pitiless rôle must now be played out. She did, however, take the feverish hand which sought hers, saying quietly,

“I can but rejoice, my child, that you are sorry for your sin; the mean, treacherous sin and deception. Freely I forgive you, as far as your offence touches me. That is very little, and whatever my wishes might be, I am bound to atone for your offences against others; therefore you had better comprehend at once, that, after the disgrace you have brought upon your name, I cannot take you back to the home in which you have long

been the single element of discord. Submission is now your true and only course. If ever again you would regain a fragment of the ground you have lost, you must put yourself unresistingly into my hands. I owe it to others, and to vast interests which might otherwise be compromised, that you should be kept where you can do no mischief until all danger is past. Mark my words, that rebellion will be your utter ruin. I will not leave you, while I take you from the world I share your exile; your fare shall be mine; if privations become necessary, they are for me as well as for you. All I ask is perfect submission, and I have it in my power to enforce this, if it be not willingly granted."

"Oh, mamma, mamma! I will tell you anything, if you will not threaten me in that terrible way."

"Then tell me you will submit in unquestioning obedience to my commands.

Remember, withal, that I am your mother, and could not, even were it decreed, do violence to that relation, unless you force me to it by attempts at rebellion."

"Oh, no, mamma, I will not rebel! Let me see Gerald Harewood just once more in your presence, just for his sake. I will tell him nothing, nothing; but this suspense will almost kill him."

Cecile pleaded in a voice so pathetic, that it might have warmed a petrifying heart, while she clasped her hands, now icy cold, upon her burning brow.

"Gerald Harewood!" retorted the mother. "Do you suppose, Cecile, he will ever look upon you again, or think of you as other than a disgraceful shadow which once darkened his path? Banish all thought of him, as to-morrow he will have dismissed all memory of you."

"Oh, no! mamma, you do not know him. To-morrow he will be at Rook's Dene, ready to take me for ever from those

who cannot understand me, and who will not believe me innocent; that is, if Ambroise mailed my letters as he promised," continued Cecile, unconscious of the magnitude of her indiscretion.

Lady di Spagna was all awake now.

"What letters? Where have you seen Ambroise?"

In the newly aroused confidence of her heart and to vindicate her predictions, Cecile, not suspecting the consequences, told the story of the meeting with her brother, his care of her letters, and his parting words of counsel and sympathy.

Lady Ethel was in despair, and began to appreciate the accumulating difficulties of her task. With Father Ambroise, she knew there was neither sophistry nor compromise. His directness of purpose and frankness of speech were weapons with which she did not know how to cross her own.

"Did you not promise me, Cecile, you

would not speak of this matter to anyone, until you had seen me?"

Cecile shook her head; and what more her mother might have extorted from her it is not easy to say, had not the daughter's condition begun to make serious appeal to the maternal anxieties.

"Oh, mamma, shall we not soon be—home—or somewhere? I am very ill," she cried pitifully as she went from burning heat into an ague, the like of which the thoroughly terrified mother had never witnessed. This was followed by a deadly swoon, so long continued and so corpse-like, that the half repentant woman called out for help, inwardly accusing herself of having caused the death of her child.

But Cecile revived, and revived to a sense of the most acute physical suffering she had ever experienced, and still keener mental anguish. The faintest dawn of the wintry day was seen in the cold grey

eastern sky, when the carriage halted for a moment or two before a gateway, which was quietly opened. The party was received by a fair, heavenly faced woman in the dress of a nun, covered by a floating veil, with cap and kerchief of spotless white.

The visitors evidently had been looked for. They were first conducted, without any parley, into a warm and well-lighted parlour, destitute of luxury or ornament, but profusely furnished with encouraging pictures of saintly martyrdom, where the most refined tortures were borne with smiling face and enraptured gesture. All these were very consolatory to the failing faith of those who sought to walk in saintly steps and were beset by evil on the way ; but poor Cecile was far too ill to notice any of these, much less appreciate the character of the asylum to which her mother's prudence had carried her. In fact the genial warmth of the room,

with the dazzling light and the strange voices quite overcame her. Head and heart sickened again; she tottered a step or two and fell fainting into the stout arms of the Abbess, who had been quick enough to prevent her falling heavily upon the ground. She was carried to a room, and, still insensible, was undressed and laid upon a bed, which if not soft, was clean and fresh. Before the day closed that had dawned so gloomily, she was in the very jaws of death. A brain fever of no ordinary intensity was the natural result of the fierce excitement and exposure she had endured for the past twenty-four hours. Her wandering fancies were pathetic, and wrung the heart of those who watched and listened to her incoherent cries. Yet her heart and mind, so lovely in their fabric, so lifted above the gross things of earth, displayed their exquisite texture even when cast forth in shapeless fragments. Her ravings were never of

sin or shame, but were sweet confessions of a purer life, while invoking heavenly aid and angelic ministrants. Now and then a human note would mingle with the higher strains, but even that was but a vibration of hallowed love, which seemed to throb through the palpitating heart, amidst the anguish of body and dethronement of intellect.

Days merged into weeks, while the great destroyer, struggling for the body, which in its very frailness seemed almost intangible, was kept at bay. Strength returned slowly, almost imperceptibly; that is, disease gradually disappeared, but the shattered intelligence was yet slower in collecting and re-uniting the disjointed fragments. Indeed, long after the tide of returning physical strength had set in, there remained a profound mental lethargy, an inability to shake off the stupor, which quite justified now the hissing whisper of the Jesuit's query.

The mother, in her secret heart, felt something like an acknowledgment of Heaven's terrible retribution when she tried to follow the incoherent wanderings, or sought to penetrate the ominous silence of the patient sufferer when questioned or consoled.

During all those fearful weeks, Lady Ethel watched and prayed with a fervour quite in contrast with her former scanty demonstrations of affection for her child. Masses were said in the chapel, and litanies to the Virgins were hourly chanted by the devotees in the convent in behalf of the unconscious subject, while she lingered on the threshold of the shadowy world. There was at least no insincerity in the fervour of the petitions for the salvation of her soul, if the frail body should be taken from earthly pain, or never again be the temple of reinstated reason.

It would be as difficult to understand as

to picture the conflicting feelings within the mother's heart, while the spark of life was so feebly flickering. A solution of many troubles would be reached if the issue were death. But as life seemed spared and yet no ray of light pierced the clouded mind, she could, it may be believed, but sink under the self-conviction that judgment had come in the form she had invoked, and she was forced to gaze with tearful eyes upon the sacrifice, as Cecile lay calm and quiet before her, the fair transparent hands clasped resignedly upon the innocent bosom which had never harboured wrong or falsehood, while the clear blue eyes were fixed on something, not vacancy, far beyond her mother's reach of vision. It seemed to her that the better and immortal part of the girl had been carried where nothing could harm it, while the beautiful body, with the mere breath of life sustaining it, was left a haunting presence here.

We must believe, too, that the harder traits of the mother's nature gave way to the yearning desire to have the terrible silence broken, and to hear herself addressed once more with the sweetest word of human love. She surely could not endure the thought that while the still lovely form was permitted on earth, it should never again be other than the tenement of an animal existence, with scarcely more than a vital spark to recall the once bright and pure intelligence. How could she pray amid such conflicts? How listen composedly to the suggestions of those, who reminded her that her stern and uncompromising vows were recorded upon a pitiless scroll, and there could be no softening of the hard duty, no yielding in the iron necessity of the sacrifice with which she quitted Rook's Dene upon her inauspicious mission. It was in derisive mockery that her own soul replied to such comforters. "Alas! your secrets are all safe

now ; a seal as infrangible as that which closes the gaping tomb is put upon the disclosures of that dark hour in the Oratory. The prison doors may now be safely opened ; there is no power here to obstruct your work." But the word was "go forward." Complications had arisen, and the return of the missing girl to her old home, as such a helpless wreck of the sweet maiden whom all remembered, would necessitate explanations and require a form of watchfulness which might lead to worse evils than those which had been avoided. Circumstances seemed to hedge in the mother and child, and Lady Ethel could not but submit to the remorseless hand that impelled her onward.

It had recently transpired that Lady Milicent, with Gerald Harewood, was vigorously pursuing a search for her cousin. Lady Ethel, until very lately, was supposed to be gravely ill at Rook's Dene, unable to support the sorrow and

alleged disgrace of her daughter's disappearance. Accidentally, nay providentially, the fact had been revealed that Lady di Spagna was not at Rook's Dene, and evidently had not been there since Cecile's flight. It also became pretty certain that Mr. Harewood and his friends were on the right track, having become possessed of information which could be used to the injury of the interests that had rendered Cecile's sacrifice necessary. This gentleman had not scrupled to employ very worldly means, and very legitimate agents to aid in the search, and any day the minions of the state, armed with the Queen's authority, might appear at the door of the convent which was sheltering the fugitives.

It was not very difficult, therefore, to persuade the medical man who had charge of Cecile's case, that her only chance of recovery lay in an entire change of scene, and to prescribe a milder climate and a

long sea voyage as the means most likely to restore her to a measure of health. Not much time was lost in following these welcome prescriptions, and it did not need long search to find a ship bound to the antipodes, upon which, upon liberal terms, the invalid and her limited suite could be received as the only cabin passengers. To that severe necessity Lady di Spagna had to submit, leaving all minor arrangements and practical difficulties to be managed by the administrative talent left behind, while a distracted lover and the methodical baroness could visit convents and asylums without danger to anyone.

Meanwhile, a brief paragraph had found its way into some widely circulated journals, to the effect that Lady di Spagna, unable longer to bear the anguish and suspense caused by her daughter's disappearance, had started off with a medical attendant and sufficient escort, upon the forlorn hope

of finding her child in America. At the same time, it was certain that no one would have found Lady di Spagna in America, had they been simple enough to look for her in that direction.

The lady's Italian lord did not perceive many attractions at Rook's Dene after the departure of his wife, and not having acquired an enthusiastic admiration for England or its climate, he returned, it is supposed, to more congenial skies, for he was never seen again in those cypress shades.

CHAPTER XVI.

RESEARCHES ABROAD.



IT is not our intention to follow the sisters in their continental tour, nor tarry with them in art galleries, upon gay boulevards, and in venerable cathedrals or the gaudy temples of a later age.

Lady Milicent was not a stranger to Paris and its fascinations, and she renewed the joy of her own early youth as she conducted her enthusiastic and appreciative young sister through scenes and

haunts of beauty, which had once filled her own heart with delight, and had furnished the keenest intellectual stimulus to further inquiry and study.

Lady Milicent's tour was not merely one of pleasure and recreation. She had marked out a task for herself and a consecration of her wealth, which gave a special point to her researches upon the Continent. This work had long been urging itself upon her mind and conscience; but so long as her fate and fortune were linked with another's, she did not feel perfectly free to give it any definite form and direction. For years past she had studied, as far as she had found opportunity, the practical operations of sisterhoods, as a powerful ally of the church, in ministerial and missionary labours. She had watched with a lively interest the few scattered communities which, under adverse circumstances and against popular prejudices, were doing

noble service in the metropolis and elsewhere in England, and she had long been inspired in some manner to identify herself, personally or indirectly, with an association of this order.

There is a blessed facility in the human spirit to stretch forth to new supports, when that particular one to which it has long clung is suddenly and rudely torn away; and thus it was with the heart of this devoted woman. All that it had to offer of human love and earthly hope had been cast before one tottering shrine. With the fall of that and the perfect shattering of the idol, all the romance of life was buried beneath the ruins. But upon the wreck was laid a rich and costly offering, a devotion of self and substance to bring a blessing upon a multitude. To give to this self-devotion a practical shape, to make this offering of her abundance subservient to the good of the many, and yet to do nothing noisily,

to be talked about, nothing unwomanly, nothing unworthy of the rank and position in which God had placed her, or of their corresponding social duties; while yet the result of her labours should be churchly, without touch of bigotry, to be as it were an anointed handmaid of the ministry, devoid of superstition in doctrine or spirit—such was the problem Lady Milicent now aimed to solve.

There seemed, alas! no one to guide her; for since the revelations of that winter afternoon at Daneshurst, she had almost ceased to confide in any living man. The bishops, if they had deigned to listen to her schemes at all, were too much hampered by episcopal caution and shut in by rigid prescriptions to advise unreservedly. In fact there was too much red tapeism altogether in the high ecclesiastical society for her to look there with any hope of receiving much disinterested counsel or effective aid. Still, nowise shaken in her

resolve, and determined to acquire all the practical information within her reach, she started upon a systematic investigation. She visited convents, without alarming sensitive superiors as to her candidature for some conventual post of distinction. Her high-born manners and courteous inquiries never gave offence, and promptly procured for her unusual privileges of research. When the knowledge she was in quest of was obtained, the expression of her gratitude was supported by the royalty of her gifts to the sick and needy sufferers within the house which had honoured her benevolent study.


From rigid convents she turned to the modest and unobtrusive associations of Protestant deaconesses, whose lives were devoted to the alleviation of physical wretchedness and greater moral disorders, untrammelled by the discipline and relentless conditions of conventual life. These associations under Lutheran influ-

ence had long been in active operation, and were an established thing on the Continent among the most ultra of Protestants, long before they were dreamed of in England as a necessary part of the machinery which should strengthen the movements of the Church of England.

She had not been able to explore the subject very deeply or thoroughly, when her studies were suddenly brought to a close. It had been her intention to proceed to Italy, and to bask awhile in its sunshine beneath those glorious skies, before devoting herself to further researches in Germany and Prussia, and then return to her own country to give the best tangible form to the ideal work, as it should grow under study and experience.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEWS FROM HOME.

ADY MILICENT'S sojourn in Paris was drawing to a close, and the day actually fixed for resuming their travel by slow stages to Rome. All this while, it must be observed, Lady Milicent had had but scanty correspondence with Daneshurst, having purposely abstained from writing to the few who would have answered her letters. She thought this the truest wisdom. She had a wound concealed which would grow

worse by handling. Her business matters would be well managed by her steward, and she dared not linger just yet, even in thought, at the beloved altars, and she could only commit the spiritual interests of her people to God. To Cecile alone had she written occasionally, and greatly marvelled that no answering word had come from her cousin, whom she pictured to herself as so absorbed with preparations for her wedding, as to have little time for epistolary recreation. Then, too, Lady Milicent had a secret misgiving that Cecile had never quite forgiven her harshness upon the morning of that day, which stood out in dark relief among all other days of her life.

The solution, however, came in a packet from Daneshurst, already strangely delayed at her bankers. In the enclosure was a letter postmarked Westmeath, addressed in a masculine hand altogether unfamiliar to her, which a little startled her. She opened it quickly and read,

“ My dear Lady Leycour,

“ The letter which I here enclose was entrusted to me several weeks ago, by my unfortunate step-sister, upon my solemnly promising to mail it without delay, yielding to her urgent declarations that it contained matter of the utmost importance.

“ I delayed not a moment, as I believed, to fulfil my promise. Most unhappily, in my own agitation, and in the darkness of the night, I must have mistaken for these letters two comparatively worthless circulars, which I had with me, franked for the post. It is only this day, that I discover this letter, with another, committed to me at the same time, in the pocket of a vestment which I have not had occasion to wear since that unhappy night of Cecile's disappearance. May God forbid there should be any connection between my blunder and her untoward fate.

“ Will your ladyship communicate to me, if it be possible, the nature of the letter, that is if it can throw any light upon the dark subject, and thus, I devoutly pray, allow me the small consolation of knowing, if so it be, that I am not responsible for her misdirected flight, and oblige

“ Your very obedient servant,

“ AMBROGIO DI SPAGNA.”

Twice, thrice she read these lines before she could even faintly comprehend its meaning. Her eyes grew dim, and the letter fell from her nerveless hand, as she exclaimed,

“ What can this mean? Dear, dear, Cecile! What does he say? ‘her misdirected flight.’ Oh! why did I leave her in that nest of vipers?”

With a trembling hand she tore open her cousin’s note. The dainty writing upon the delicately tinted paper, faintly

perfumed, was like the many she had garnered. The date she recognized as the day of her own departure from England. She gathered very little comfort as she read,

“Dearest Milicent,

“I am perhaps taking my life in my hands in making this revelation to you. It is only, after all, my body, that their blind zeal can destroy. Believe—believe me—dearest cousin, incredulous as you are wont to be, that my worst suspicions are more than confirmed by knowledge that I have acquired this evening, through means which have put me in the power of an unscrupulous enemy.

“You and yours are environed with danger, and I tremble to think that even before this reaches you, your dear sister may be wrested from you. Guard her well. Never trust her from your sight. Milicent, dear, there is a determined

enemy within your very doors. My cousin May was years ago secretly baptized, and devoted to the Virgin, and there is a plot well-matured to take her from you. Her other guardian is a Jesuit, whether priest or layman I do not know, it matters very little. Perhaps I need not tell you this.

“Could I but see you for ten minutes only, I would tell you volumes which I may not write.

“I am utterly helpless and in the power of these fanatical zealots, and I am resigned to any revenge they may choose to inflict upon me. If we never meet again, dearest Milicent, be sure that I am not guilty of the wicked things of which I am already accused, and that until death,

“I am thine ever loving cousin,

“CECILE.”

“Cecile! Cecile! thus lost to me!

What can it mean? My little May in danger too!" burst from Lady Milicent's lips.

Without pausing to read the letter again, she ran into the adjoining room and gave a deep sigh of relief as she saw the fair young face sleeping in child-like innocence, disturbed by no theological bugbears, nor haunted by ecclesiastical wrangles. Her sister knelt reverently by the bedside for a few minutes and prayed fervently for guidance through her difficult way, as she invoked protection for the slumbering darling. She then returned to her sitting-room and rang for her servants. To these she announced that news from England necessitated an immediate change in her plans, and instead of proceeding to Italy, she would start the following morning for Daneshurst.

The faithful servant to whom she especially gave her orders, seemed in no wise astonished at her sudden resolution, and

presuming upon his long and loving service, respectfully asked if his mistress had heard any later news from Miss Fayne, and if his lady did not think there was some mistake. There was something in his manner indicating that he had intelligence which she did not possess. It was elicited, accordingly, by her brief reply,

“I have no news at all, Joseph. Have you heard anything?”

With a solemnity, quite awful and imposing, the man drew from his pocket a local journal which had been sent to him by one of his fellow-servants at home.

“Here, my lady, is what the wicked papers say—but—but—my lady knows, that it cannot be true, possibly. We all know Miss Cecile is too good for this wicked world, and everyone knows, if I may be so bold as to say such a thing in your ladyship’s presence, that Rook’s Dene was no place for Miss Cecile.

They were no friends there to the dear young lady; no, nor, if your ladyship will let me say so, to my mistress either, more than to Miss Cecile."

"I quite agree with you, my good Joseph," and she took the paper. Her eyes fell at once upon a heading from which, ordinarily, they would have turned, but now the words had a gloomy fascination, as she read,

SCANDAL IN HIGH LIFE.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF A YOUNG LADY.

"The aristocratic circles of Bertsford and Westmeath have been painfully exercised for some time by the extraordinary disappearance of Miss Fayne, a daughter, by a former marriage, of the Lady di Spagna of Rook's Dene. It was feared at first that some mishap had befallen the missing girl, as for some time before she had shown symptoms of mental aberration. These painful apprehensions have given

place to even more melancholy convictions, and her friends are forced to believe that she has eloped with an Italian, who was employed as steward and head-servant at Rook's Dene. Her extraordinary conduct, which for a while was charitably supposed to be the result of mental weakness, is now attributed to her infatuation for the low-born man, who, doubtless, accompanies her in her flight. The strangest fact of the case is that she was on the very eve of marriage into a highly respected family.

“It is needless to say that her mother is plunged into the most profound sorrow, while a large circle of friends and relatives is scandalized. The young lady is nearly connected with the young Baroness Leycour, of Daneshurst, and bore a reputation of the most Evangelical piety and partisanship in church politics. The police up to this time have altogether failed to get any trace of the fugitives,

who most probably have betaken themselves to the Western world, where they can be so effectually and socially disguised, as to make recovery of the young lady thoroughly impossible. But as marriages there are as easily contracted, as they can subsequently be cancelled, it is at least to be hoped that the shrewd Italian adventurer has been persuaded to give her a legal right to bear his name, humble though it be. We cannot but express our deepest sympathy for the afflicted mother, and pity, mingled with congratulations at this lucky escape, for the jilted suitor."

"Was there ever anything so infamous!" exclaimed the Baroness, dashing the paper down. "Can the hand live, and not be withered, that penned so atrocious a calumny? May God help me to vindicate the innocent, and explode that Jesuitical nest which sends forth such foul birds of prey to fasten their


unclean talons on the very heart of innocence and truth! Joseph!" The man stood petrified at the transformation in his cold and dignified mistress, whom he had never before seen ruffled, or from whose lips had heard a loud or passionate word. "Joseph, you are listening to me?" her voice was calmer, but her eye still flashed and her cheek had grown very pale now that the flush was gone.

"I mark every word, my dear mistress."

"This is all a wretched, wicked fabrication; a fiendish invention, Joseph, to cover some fearful wrong. My cousin has learned something which it is inconvenient she should know, and those people at Rook's Dene have put her where she can tell no tales, and this is the infamous story with which they think to blind the world. But no one who knew Cecile Fayne will be thus persuaded. The truth shall be sifted, so help me Heaven!"

There was a momentary hush in which the lady seemed to realise that the good man was listening to her reflections in speechless wonder, he knowing, perchance, nothing of the ways of "those people at Rook's Dene" whom she accused. She added, still more calmly. "Joseph, I see that you have no more faith in this miserable scandal than myself."

"Bless you, my dear lady," and the man gave a sickly smile, "as if anybody who had ever known or seen the young lady, *could* believe such a story. Why, my lady, I said to Annette at once that it was a wicked, made-up thing. Why, Miss Cecile is such a perfect lady, so refined like; why, she would never have such a man as that dirty-faced Lorenzo to wait upon her, if she was mistress at Rook's Dene. Besides all this, my lady, there is something else very curious, something Annette (Lady Milicent's confidential maid) and I talked about not a little.



When we stopped at Rouen, while your ladyship was in one of those old churches, that I can never think of its name—in the very street just by, we saw that same Lorenzo, playing the gentleman in fine clothes, with a trumpery watch chain. He was in a—whatever they call an eating-house. No ghost, my lady, could ever be whiter than he turned; he tried not to see us, and he answered in some jargon when Annette spoke to him. She understood. He disappeared very soon inside the house.”

Lady Milicent was thoroughly interested and aroused.

“You are sure he was alone, Joseph?”

“There was a coarse, rough-looking Frenchman beside him, who stayed at the table after Lorenzo disappeared. No lady, no woman scarcely, would have stopped at *such* a place. In spite of Lorenzo’s fine clothes and gilt chain, no one would have mistaken him for a gentleman. No,

no, my lady, Miss Cecile has nothing to do with him."

"I am sure of that, as sure as I am of my life, and of your fidelity, my good Joseph," replied his mistress, deeply touched by the man's steadfast faith, and the delicacy with which he expressed it. "Remember well, Joseph," she continued, "all these facts which you have told me; the date of our visit to Rouen, the locality of the restaurant, the Italian's appearance; you may be able to give important evidence in the vindication of my cousin's name, and do a great deal towards her recovery. And now, in all confidence, I must tell you that I have a short letter from my cousin, written the very day we left Daneshurst, but unfortunately, through some accident, it was not forwarded to me as it should have been. Whether or not I shall ever again have another line from the unhappy girl, God only knows! She was evidently in some perilous position

when her letter was written, which she made further hazardous by writing to me. In fact, she tells me what gives me the greatest anxiety—Joseph, I can trust you, but at this moment no one else. What I am now telling you must not be repeated, even to Annette, faithful as I believe her to be. Some great evil, I scarcely know what, is threatening my sister. You loved my father, Joseph; you served him with a fidelity which often taxed you sorely. We remember, even if you have forgotten, your devotion to my own dear mother; and later, your happy service and tender care of the childish wife so quickly taken from us, but leaving so precious a legacy in our little May. By the memory of all those dear ones gone from us, I beg, Joseph, for more than an ordinary oversight of my young sister. In the world there are many wicked people; happily, we can avoid their ill-doing if they are openly wicked; but, alas! there are not

a few who mean to be good, and really think they are doing good, when they actually are busy with very wicked things, thinking that if good can be accomplished by evil means, God will forgive the wickedness of the means, because some good is gained. Some such people, I fear, are plotting against my happiness, and will try to wrest my sister from me. Therefore, I ask you to help me guard your young mistress; I would like to be sure, when she is not with me, she has your care."

"Let me swear to you, my lady, that——"

"Your word will do, my good Joseph," and she gently laid her hand upon his arm. The venerable servant was much affected by this assurance of his mistress's regard and the flattering confidence she reposed in him, and, as if he could not express his appreciation of all this standing erect before her, he dropped upon one

knee, and, with the reverence with which holy things are touched, he took the hand which had so greatly honoured him. Never did knight bow more loyally before his sovereign than this long-tried servant knelt before his mistress, as he kissed the fair hand which had, as it were, invested him with a sword of honour and defence. From that hour, the unconscious May had a keeper of wondrous tact. Whenever his presence might have seemed uncalled for, or the least intrusive, it was unseen. Yet had anything threatened her, nothing short of overwhelming force would have stayed the imaginary sword, or, indeed, have wrested the actual weapon carried in secret by the devoted man ever after the chivalrous investiture on that troubled evening in the Place Vendôme.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INVESTIGATIONS.



THE day that brought the cruel tidings to Lady Milicent, also carried a letter to the despairing Harewood in his darkened home in Devonshire. Rumours, wretched and improbable, had already travelled thither, and though utterly discredited, they wounded and distressed the heart from which hope and comfort had already fled. Yet not for one moment was a doubt of Cecile's purity and fidelity to himself entertained. It mat-

tered very little to him that the priest and officer had each borne damaging witness to the story which was circulating, nor yet that the disappearance of the Italian steward cruelly coincided with the still more inexplicable absence of his beloved. He turned a deaf ear to daily accumulating evidence such as would have shaken the faith of a weaker-hearted lover, and which was gradually persuading the world at large of the fall of a refined and highly scrupulous young woman, betrothed to the man she professed to love, whose every surrounding bore proof of exquisite taste and delicacy; whose religious professions were well known, and whose daily life was an exemplification of Christian truth and benevolence.

That such a woman should leave home, position, and everything to the very least of her worldly possessions, under the persuasion and protection of an ignorant, almost repulsive foreigner, was a suppo-

sition not for one instant harboured by the man who loved her and had fathomed the very depths of her pure and holy nature. He heard, too, with stolid indifference that the dark waters of the stream had been dragged, and the stagnant pools stirred up: no such dismal theory of her absence disturbed him. He knew that police quarters were daily besieged for tidings of her; that large rewards were offered for her recovery, living or dead; but he was not moved to join in these inquiries. He felt a conviction, daily strengthening, that she was alive, perchance too keenly alive in her sensibility to suffering. He was sure there was no "aberration of mind," no weakness of intellect in the blythe and light-hearted maiden with whom he had parted a few hours before the tragic occurrences that had enveloped her in mystery. Wherever she might be, and under whatever trial of mind or restraint

of body, of this he felt assured, that she was true to herself and faithful to him. That she was the victim of some damnable plot which he could not fathom, he was as certain as of his own existence; but he was perfectly at loss to know where to commence investigations. His visits to Rook's Dene, his examinations, with official help, of the Oratory, his questionings of servants, and his wanderings over the road she had taken upon that ill-starred walk, all failed to yield either light or comfort, and he turned from the melancholy haunts to dream of what she might have been in the home he had prepared for her, and where he so lately hoped she would soon preside.

Her cousin's absence was a great privation to him. He knew nothing of the unanswered letters that Lady Milicent had innocently sent from the Continent to Rook's Dene. He might have found comfort, he thought, in counsel with that

clear-sighted lady, and sagacity to direct his steps in her solution of the fearful problem. In fact, he was hurt by Lady Milicent's continued silence towards himself under the circumstances. He began to doubt the sincerity of her regard for Cecile, and to feel that there was not one on earth to whom he could turn for sympathy in this bitter trial of his life.

To him, therefore, Cecile's long tarrying letter came as an especial blessing. Happily, it was enclosed, as Lady Milicent's had been, with some apologetic lines from Father Ambroise, so that the dear, familiar writing did not for one moment deceive him into the treacherous hope that she had returned to him. There was, however, in every word a blessed revelation of her innocence, and this only made the intimation of deeds of wicked malignity, of which she had doubtless become the victim, the more maddening to him, as he read and re-read the lines

so few, too few for his hungry heart.

“Come to me, dearest Gerald, as soon as this reaches you. Do not, if you love me, tarry one hour. Something, has happened of which I dare not write, but I *must leave this house at once!* If I am left free in my movements until to-morrow, I will go to Daneshurst and put myself under my cousin’s protection; you will look there for me if you do not find me at Rook’s Dene. I am ill and almost distracted. If only you had not gone to Devonshire until to-morrow, or waited another night, this had not happened. But it may be all for the best. God knows! Be sure, my ever beloved, whatever may befall, that I am, in life and death, thine only and ever.

“CECILE.”

He read, as we have said, the sad and ominous lines again and again, every word so precious and so like her dear self,

and gained fresh inspiration for renewed efforts. In fact, he seemed to have for the first time the ground for taking decisive steps, of which he had never before been sure. The mere fact of her disappearance did not seem to justify the vigorous manner in which the search should now be pushed. While preparing to act upon this resolution he received, to his great satisfaction, a summons to Daneshurst to confer with Lady Milicent. It can be believed he did not long tarry, and marvellously soon he was in close conference with the Baroness, whose grief seemed only second to his own.

They compared notes, and he repeated the strange story he had from Cecile the last day they were together. This was not quite new to Lady Milicent, who strove to conceal her agitation as the conversation led to revelations of the hidden doings and unlawful sympathies of the man to whom she had been so lately

affianced. Harewood, too, was so lost in the consideration of Cecile's probable fate, that he scarcely reflected how deeply he probed the half-closed wound, if, indeed, he then knew there had been any change in her relations to Basil-Leigh. But she stood it bravely, wincing only as the most heroic patients occasionally wince under the cruel knife. She did not resist, however, although she grew pale, and her poor heart beat tremulously at the contemplation of schemes which could not but suppose the complicity of a man whose actions, reason as she might, could scarcely ever be without interest for her; this, too, when neither she nor Harewood knew anything of the crowning scene at the secret conference in the Oratory.

When each had learned all that the other could tell, they deliberated as to proceedings, and promised to meet again in a few days, when Harewood should have obtained legal advice in London.

A plan of action was concerted which, mysteriously enough, was quickly whispered in suspected quarters, reaching the very watchers by the sick bed of the unconscious Cecile. Little dreamed they, the solicitous lover and sorrowing kinswoman, that the very thoroughness of the means of investigation, and the earnestness of their research, sent the hapless sufferer far beyond their reach, to encounter the perils of a long and stormy voyage to the Indian seas.

The hour that Lady Milicent received Harewood for the melancholy conference, they could have walked, without greatly overtaxing their strength, to the quiet shelter where Cecile lay closely guarded; whereas, upon the day when the first vigorous search was made in haunts little likely to have brought success, the poor girl was tossing and plunging upon the wild winter's sea, a hundred miles at least from England's stormy coast, experiencing

less, perhaps, than those who watched her, the misery and general disgust of life which await the unhabituated in their earliest hours upon Neptune's rough dominion. Happily, neither Lady Milicent nor Harewood was permitted to add this knowledge to the weight which already bowed their hearts.

CHAPTER XIX.

FATHER AMBROISE AT DANESHURST.



NOT long after Harewood left Daneshurst, its mistress received Father Ambroise.

“I obey your ladyship’s summons without an hour’s delay,” was his salutation, stayed by no trifling with irrelevant allusions to weather or season. “But if I know what you would ask, I am, alas! powerless to help you. I am sorely heart-stricken too. You will believe me, I am sure.”

Lady Milicent’s hand was still in his

grasp, as he said this with sorrowful earnestness. She pointed him to a chair, and in silence took a seat near him. Her heart was so full, that she needed a moment to recover herself, and then it was in a quivering uncertain voice that she said,

“M. di Spagna—or rather Father Ambroise, for so you will permit me to address you, will you bear patiently with me, if my questions are intrusive, or if I tax your forbearance by over-plain speaking? My task is painful, most painful,” she spoke with great emphasis, “but I would accomplish it with as little trouble to others as possible. I believe you to be sadly stricken, as you assure me, and I hasten to tell you that it is because of my perfect confidence in your honour and integrity that I have asked you to come here. Oh! then, for the love of Him whose minister you are, you will not, surely you will not refuse to aid me in

the task, already too long deferred, of seeking my cousin and vindicating her spotless name?"

The priest sadly shook his head. "Lady Leycour, what can I do? What is it you ask?"

"First of all, Father Ambroise, tell me in perfect frankness if you credit for one instant the vile stories which have been circulated concerning my cousin Cecile, bearing all too plainly the impress of the spirit at Rook's Dene, which has borne so heavily upon Cecile's life and peace for long years?"

He paused a moment. "Your ladyship has heard that the last I saw of my unhappy sister, was upon that miserable night when she quitted her mother's house. She was not then alone, my Lady Leycour. Yet, I cannot resist the convictions that her explanation was true, that she was really stealing to the post-office with letters she did not care to trust to

the ordinary channel at home. The letters I took from her hand. But these questions arise—whither did she drive? I saw her enter the carriage without resistance, the suspected companion entering it with her. Where did she alight? Where is Lorenzo? Who and where is the coachman who drove her off? As far as appearances are worth anything, they all tell against her. Yet, I repeat my belief in her perfect innocence. Who, indeed, could doubt it, who had, as I, dwelt beneath the same roof, and made note of her daily life for years. Will it comfort you at all to know my Lady Leycour, that I could no more associate the idea of sinful conduct, impurity of thought or deed with Cecile than a ransomed saint. I have never seen a character more thoroughly unworldly, ay! unearthly, if you can appreciate the distinction; with a higher sense of christian duty brought to rule even the little things of daily life,

amid a multitude of petty vexations and trials of temper. Her's was ever the gentle word that turneth away wrath, and the chastened spirit that turns the other cheek to him who hath already smitten the one. With this intimate knowledge of her life and character can I believe Cecile Fayne to have voluntarily wandered one step from rectitude, although the accusing circumstances are strong and almost overwhelming."

"Voluntarily wandered, you say! Oh! Father, whither, by whom have her steps been forced?" exclaimed Lady Milicent with rising fears.

"Would to God, most honoured lady, that I knew. Were it mine to give, my very life indeed would I freely yield to be able to restore her to you. I cannot even conjecture where she may be found. Darkness, thicker than the night in which we lost her, envelopes the whole mystery. Do you believe me, Lady Leycour? Can

you credit thus far the word of one whose very creed you think another name for craft and double purpose?"

"I do believe you. From my very soul I credit all you say. Never, I rejoice to say, have I discovered aught in you false to the traits of Him you preach and serve, nor can I think you are of those, in your own church, to whom sinful means become consecrated when they work out what is called a righteous end."

"Then, my lady, let me speak directly to this subject, and vow to you before my God——"

"Not so, good Father," interrupted Lady Milicent, "to me your yea and nay are all sufficient."

"May I declare to you then with all solemnity, that since my establishment in this country, I have been practically an alien to the household of Rook's Dene, and in no wise shared the spirit of that place. You may not know that I am not even

permitted the office of confessor to the heads of the family, so unworthy am I regarded of their confidence. For the zeal of proselytizing, therefore, which affects Lady di Spagna, I am not responsible. I have laboured to do my duty here as I interpret it, simply as one of God's pastors towards those sheep of my own flock which are to be found here, over which fold I believe God has given me charge. I repel the idea of invading, even with spiritual weapons, and in religious strife the jurisdiction of others, where I have no right to enter. Furthermore, I utterly abhor the wolves, which in clever disguise, have obtained entrance into unsuspecting folds. If I believed there was the slightest chance of your obtaining any satisfaction or consolation, I would commend you to one or two persons whose ideas of doing honour and service to God and His Church take the form of a crooked diplomacy, for which

I find no warrant either in my priestly vows or in the holiest traditions and spirit of the Church, at whose altars we are at best but unprofitable servants."

"I quite understand you, Father. It is precisely for this end that I have requested this visit, to direct me to these mistaken zealots, to whom I feel we are indebted for the calamity which you and I equally mourn."

He smiled incredulously. "My lady, if you build much hope upon the result of an appeal in that quarter, I fear you know little of the enemy with whom you would contend. An open assault would be skilfully foiled, and you surely cannot match their craft."

"Must I stand still then, Father Ambrose, and stretch forth no hand? Must I stay every effort to recover my cousin? Surely, surely, you have opportunities quite out of my reach! Have you no duties toward the poor girl, whom you do

not hesitate to call your sister? Have you no personal desire to unravel the mystery?"

"Plainly speaking, Lady Leycour, I have no power. The opportunities of which you speak are not in my grasp. Duties and desires—yes! The conflict is tearing my very soul at this moment. I repeat that life itself would be a cheap sacrifice if it could purchase my sister's ransom. But you forget that I have no more *knowledge* than you possess. My suspicions, like your own, may be altogether misdirected. It is said that Lady di Spagna herself is utterly crushed, and has not left her bed since Cecile's disappearance. She certainly receives no one. I have endeavoured to see her, but she is reported to be so alarmingly ill, that her life is despaired of."

"And can you believe such reports, Father Ambrose? Do you think it likely that so very unnatural a mother as Lady

Ethel proved herself towards Cecile, would be so crushed, mentally and physically, that she would keep her bed all these weeks, because she was rid of a very troublesome and heretical child?"

"I have never doubted her being grievously afflicted, and the accounts of her condition that I have had from your friend Madame Grillet, are truly alarming!"

"Madame Grillet!" exclaimed the Baroness in despair. "Surely she is not of the household at Rook's Dene."

"Since she quitted Daneshurst, her home has been there, I believe."

"Then, Father Ambroise, be assured that Lady di Spagna is not ill at Rook's Dene. There are more cogent reasons why no one sees her there. She is my poor Cecile's warder in some hidden place. Will you not, can you not, in mercy's name, find out that hiding-place? Cecile has knowledge which those ladies, with many others perhaps, would object to have published."

Lady Milicent then told him all she knew and had gathered in fragments. Then, as in final appeal, she asked his perusal of the letters he had so unhappily failed to forward. It was now his turn to blanch and tremble, and for a moment seemed perfectly overcome. He found it difficult to harmonize all the statements, but after a minute's reflection, he said sorrowfully,

“Lady Leycour, these letters, with what you tell me, give the first shock to my faith in Cecile's sanity. The Oratory is a simple building, octagonal in form, with a single entrance, and no other opening save two narrow lancet windows through which a tiny child could not pass. There has been some special license granted by which mass can be said in it for the benefit of the household—for this purpose alone, I believe, the chapel was constructed. Lady di Spagna, you know, is a great devotee, and never omits her

daily worship. She has not been very well of late and the walk to the church in bad weather she has found too long. Upon a few occasions, I have said mass myself in this domestic chapel, and can assure you," he smiled with amusement, "there is nothing mysterious or inquisitorial in the simple octagon, built upon a grassy mound, approached by a shady footpath sheltered from the wind, and easy of access in all weather."

"I do not doubt it, yet I do not believe my cousin mistaken in what she alleges to have seen there. Nor is she in the slightest degree impaired in intellect, or given to false assertions."

"How then do you explain her statement as to your sister's baptism?"

"Alas! there is nothing to explain. The fact is too sadly proved. It was the work, years ago, of that treacherous woman in whom we had the most perfect confidence, the same who now presides at Rook's Dene."

The priest started as Lady Milicent went on.

“ She persuaded the child, then very young, to believe it a mere joke, but subsequently taught her to draw consolation from the fact, that she was safely baptized, under all circumstances ; for if her Protestant baptism should happen to be worthless she had the other in reserve. This I have only just learned. By inspiring fears that she might distress her father or anger me, she has been induced to say nothing. It was with infinite difficulty, but a few hours since, that I have forced the truth from the child, who is still in terror of the threatened judgments in store for her if she betrayed her governess. Moreover, she has been well plied with your books of instruction, and has been taught doctrines which are strange to the church of her fathers. I have a difficult task before me, Father Ambroise, in respect to my sister, which would seem

perhaps, overwhelming, if I were not equally absorbed now in anxiety for my cousin."

Her companion's face betrayed no little inward commotion. There was something painfully ominous in his solemn manner.

"You are right, Lady Leycour, if this be true, your sister claims your most watchful care. In fact, you cannot too closely guard her person. If you know what it is to be baptized into the Catholic Church you will understand me. The story of the Jewish boy, Mortara, is not yet forgotten, and the lesson should be well remembered. There is very little danger in England, but in Catholic countries the Church can claim its own for instruction and safeguard against perversion of faith. It makes no difference that the right was obtained by indirectly, and the baptism administered in secret. I sin, perhaps, beyond churchly absolution in

giving you this warning. If I sin, may God forgive me. But—but, Lady Leycour, will you forget the priest who thus speaks, and remember only the friend. Perhaps in the former light, I should be faithless to my highest trusts, if in human friendship I throw obstacles to prevent the accomplishment of the Church's designs toward even a single soul."

"You are unfit, Father, to grapple with the despotism or the intricacies of a system which makes such requirements of its servants, or in plain words with a church whose policy compromises your noble instincts, and which is unworthy of such ministrants."

"Who baptized the child?" he asked, after a gloomy silence.

"She does not seem to remember; undoubtedly it was the zealous Foligno, who is to-day a friar, and to-morrow an active priest. It may have been your Celtic Monsignore who troubles the waters here

occasionally. May insists that it was yourself, but admits at the same time all priests look alike to her. I am sure, very sure that you were no party to such a wrong; but it matters little who did it."

Father Ambroise suddenly sprang to his feet with an exclamation of pain, covering his eyes with his clenched hands.

"Oh! I see it all! I understand it now," he exclaimed. "Lady Leycour, are you not ready to invoke a curse upon us all? The child is right. I baptized her, as much a dupe myself as you a victim. Ah! I see; I see your incredulity. You distrust us all alike, and with good reason. You have already your explanation for these long belated letters. You explain my ignorance and innocence respecting Cecile; you have your interpretation of her testimony; and, last and worst, in the baptism of your sister, you see but one other link in the chain of iniquity by which you believe we are all holden. It

is perhaps, therefore, vain for me to assure you, for I see the hopeless incredulity with which you will listen to all I can repeat; and yet, Lady Leycour, I *must* tell you, how a gentle little girl was brought to me years ago by Madame Grillet, how my pity went forth to the tiny orphan, too young to understand the Italian tongue in which her sad story was told to me, and to whom I gave the tender name of *Chiara*, as I sprinkled the fair brow with the regenerating water. Lady di Spagna and my father, as much duped, I believe, as myself, stood proxies for some inaccessible god-parents. Madame, whose Catholicism, I did not even then suspect, explained her unaccustomed appearance at our church by telling me that the dead parents of her young protégée were Catholics, but unlike all Catholics with whom I had had to deal, had strangely neglected to bring their little one in infancy to the font.

“Madame was never again seen in our church, and from that day to this I have never had occasion to think of the orphaned Chiara. I had never seen your sister, and even now would scarcely recognize her out of Daneshurst; but it cuts me to the very soul to see how I am testing your faith in me. How unlikely it seems to you that I could be an involuntary party to such a wrong, such an invasion of sacred rights. I have nothing but my ignorance and sorrow to plead, and must throw myself with them upon your mercy.”

Lady Milicent's faith was indeed thus sorely tested, yet not overthrown. With her own inimitable and gentle grace, she assured him that she both comprehended and sympathized with his painful position in which designing parties had placed him.

“At the same time,” she added, “whatever rights you may claim in consequence, we cannot but regard a rite thus administered as an empty form, the child having

been duly baptized in infancy. Your own church too, Father Ambroise, admits lay baptism, and you could not assign a lower character to the sacrament administered by our own clergy."

This she said loftily, with evident betrayal of her sense of the wrong that had been inflicted, which he was not slow to perceive.

"My dear Baroness, I cannot fail to read your very just annoyance, and I fully appreciate how very improbable my explanation may seem to you. We will not discuss the question in its doctrinal aspect, but allow me to feel sure at least of this, that whatever condemnation you may think justified against certain phases of the Catholic system, you are just enough, and magnanimous enough, to believe that its ministers are not all in a league against your homes and your faith. Most of us seek only to do our Master's service in the way we have been trained to believe, and

even the manifestations of zeal, in which you see nothing but double-dealing and craft, you will admit are not for self-glorification, but to promote and strengthen the cause of our Blessed Lord and His Church. May I, therefore, hope not to be utterly condemned, although I have unwittingly been a ministrant in an instance which has caused you great discomfort. I long to hear that you acquit me of intentional wrong."

"I fully acquit you, Father Ambroise. I believe you entirely innocent of deliberate wrong in this matter. In fact, I think you altogether too good and credulous for the system whose practises you have so accurately defined. I honour your devotion, and in spite of my sweeping accusations against your church, I must confess to be among those who long and pray for the unity of Christendom, for that day when all these deplorable barriers shall be levelled, and the sweetest prophecy of

Holy Writ be accomplished in the visible realization of one fold and one shepherd. But we have digressed, and are a long way from our starting point. Moreover, I am detaining you from your manifold duties. As we part, however, I ask again, from the depths of my heart, in token of my perfect forgiveness and confidence, will you aid me in the recovery of my cousin Cecile?"

"To the very utmost extent of my power, dear lady, which I sadly fear will not reach the limit of my own fervent desires."

She perceived the delicacy with which he would remind her that, however eagerly he might wish to unravel the mystery, he was bound by sacred obligations which restrained his movements, and he could only walk in prescribed directions.

Thus she dismissed him, begging him to grant Mr. Harewood and herself another interview if it became necessary to consult him ; to which he agreed.

CHAPTER XX.

DESTINY.



THE few weeks of Lady Milicent's absence from her home had brought numerous vicissitudes to the small world in which her immediate lot was cast.

The incumbents of Daneshurst parish and the model St. Alphege had almost simultaneously been nominated to other posts. That Basil-Leigh should retire from his living was, of course, a necessity which Lady Milicent naturally expected, and consequently she was better prepared

for the step than the world in general. But that Mr. Noel, her right hand man, the almoner of her charities, and the interpreter of her churchly views, should suddenly abdicate a position where he seemed to be fulfilling every condition of usefulness to the church and happiness to himself, was a mystery which the bewildered lady would have better understood, had she possessed the knowledge acquired by her cousin in her unfortunate and involuntary *espionage* at the Oratory.

Mr. Basil-Leigh, it was said, had gone to an entirely new field of labour, where there was room for great development of church principles and practice; while his friend of St. Alphege had found his mission in still another direction, where there were goodly numbers groping in "evangelical" darkness, utterly ignorant of a truer ritual, and "high celebration." Neither of these gentlemen, it was alleged,

felt any misgivings as to the safety of the congregations they left in the temporary charge of curates, as well-instructed as themselves.

The departure of these shepherds was followed by a sad straying of the flocks they left, not into the new folds whither the shepherds had gone, but, alas ! into the very bosom of the church their own so closely resembled. The inroads made upon the ranks of the faithful in Daneshurst were appalling to the interested observer. Never in the annals of the place had it been known for whole families to abandon the faith of their fathers. Individuals had been falling off ever since Rook's Dene had become a centre of propagandism. But to Lady Milicent's unspeakable dismay, she learned, that during her brief absence, two or three families, among her own cherished pensioners had gone, father, mother and children, to the enemy's camp.

“There is so little difference,”—such was the sophistry with which they had been taught to answer, “in form and ceremony, we had better go where we are sure to be saved. The church we have left grants that salvation is to be found in that which now receives us; while this holds out no hope to those who remain outside her pale. As we have to meet pretty much the same requirements in one as the other, it makes very little difference to us to be obliged to add our belief in the Pope, and a pious recognition of the Virgin and saints to what we already profess.”

And thus they went—families to the chapel of Our Lady of the Assumption, young girls to the nunnery on the Daneshurst slopes, young men, although not so many of these, to associations of lately established lay brotherhoods. A few had rebounded to the other extreme, and the new garish meeting-house which had lately planted itself by way of antidote in

the neighbouring academic town, had received at its recent "revival" some whose ideas could not travel so fast or so far as they were impelled, and who were sadly missed from their familiar places in one or other of the churches at Daneshurst.

The contemplation of all this added to Lady Milicent's embarrassments, and she began to despair of ever realizing the hopes which had inspired and sustained her amid so many personal trials. With two important livings at her disposal, and no ready friend at hand to suggest "the right man," she was bowed with a heavy sense of responsibility, and scarcely knew where to turn for timely aid and direction. We mean human aid and friendly counsel; for Lady Milicent was old-fashioned enough to believe in the efficacy of earnest prayer, and had learned—even in her early years by a hard experience—not to trust to any child of man. Her faith and reli-

ance were not lightly placed, for above the constant murmuring undertone of anxiety which ran beneath, her ear caught, mingling with the voices of her troubled life, that of the Hearer of Prayer, supporting her with the assurance that her petition would be heard and answered in His own good time and way.

For the moment, however, her supreme anxiety was for her cousin, and her present absorbing aim was to gather all the light she could to cast upon the dark way. The deepest sickness of heart she had ever felt, even in her own grievous personal trials, took possession of her as Father Ambroise quitted her presence. She became a prey to gloomy forebodings of all that might yet be in store for her. A most painful duty seemed to press upon her before she could act intelligently respecting her cousin, a duty which she believed was more than suggested by Father Ambroise in his guarded allusions

to those who might, if they would, serve her. Before putting her actions, therefore, under legal direction, she determined to ask an interview of Mr. Basil-Leigh. He might decline to see her, or, if he saw her, he might refuse to give her the information which she believe he possessed ; but that possibility did not lessen her duty nor discourage her from asking his aid. Under this view of the necessities of her position, she gave herself no time to waver, but resolutely penned the difficult summons, which, if obeyed as promptly as the call that had brought Harewood and the confessor to her side, would find her in a few hours face to face with her heart's shattered idol. She was scarcely surprised to receive a reply with electric speed. "I will see you to-morrow afternoon, at four o'clock,"

"Four o'clock ! He remembers the very hour we loved of old ; I would he had named some other. It is too like a ghost

of other days." Such was her secret thought.

The "morrow" quickly came, and as the clock struck the once loved hour, she was in her wonted place as in happier days. So like a dream it all seemed, so like gazing in sleep upon the lost and loved, arrayed strangely with all the fantastic trickery of dreamland, in which they move and speak in the never forgotten voices. Once more she counted the strokes of the chiming bell, and her fingers seized the needlework which lay in her lap. At least she would hold it in mimic industry, although with her eyes dim and her pulses throbbing, she had neither skill nor strength to ply the needle. Not five minutes late were the steps at which she had had once the right to spring forward with sweet welcome, and even now they sent a thrill and a cold shiver from heart to head.

The wondering Joseph threw wide open

the door, and with stately ceremony not dreamed of in days gone by, announced the Reverend Basil-Leigh. Lady Milicent arose, taking but one single step towards her guest, cool, self-controlled, without a tremor in her voice. Yet even an ordinary observer would have seen she was not receiving an ordinary visitor, scarcely a welcome one. She extended her hand, but only to indicate that he should be seated. There was a cold and stately grace in her movements, and a respectful earnestness in his, which would have baffled a curious looker-on as to their relations. She did not discuss the weather, cold and bad as it was, nor waste time in polite inquiries for each other's welfare, and the few in whom they both took interest. There was not even an instant's awkward pause, for Lady Milicent went direct to the subject.

“I should apologise for calling you thus from your duties, Mr. Basil-Leigh.

You may remember the last time I saw you,"—she turned directly towards him, and if his heart retained one spark of its ancient allegiance, it must have leaped as she fixed her wondrous eyes on his and said in her own low, musical tones, "you said if ever you could serve me as a friend, I should call upon you! How little I dreamed then that I should so soon need a friend and that it would be in your power, perhaps, alone on earth to serve me! May I still count upon your friendly and timely aid?"

He, imagining nothing more than being implored to aid her in some parish detail or complete some of the works he had left unfinished, replied with prompt chivalry,

"The Baroness of Daneshurst has but to command my services. They are only limited by my power."

"Then, Mr. Basil-Leigh, in the name of mercy and pity—nay, in memory of what was *once* our relations, and of that

happy past, will you aid me in the recovery of my much loved cousin Cecile?"

This, of all things, had least entered his thoughts. He started up violently, rudely dashing away the hand which in her earnestness she had unconsciously laid upon his arm. His countenance became so utterly transformed, that she recoiled as she looked upon him.

"Is it for this, Lady Leycour, that you have brought me here? What have I to do with her? Listen, and believe me when I tell you that Cecil Fayne is not to be named by any pure and honourable woman! She has proved herself, in conduct, to be what a few have long known her to be in heart—entirely depraved, unworthy a thought from you, much less your championship—she is——"

"Enough! Mr. Basil-Leigh! For your own sake say no more; add nothing to the record of wrong with which I must ever recall you. I have not asked your

opinion of Cecile's character. None on earth know her better than I, and nothing this side of Heaven can be more pure and unspotted than she. You quite comprehend me in this. There is no need of explicit words to define to you my wishes. I am thoroughly convinced of your power to aid me in the work which has fallen to my hands. Will you so aid me? You decline?"

He was silent, and Lady Milicent continued.

"If Cecile be still a living woman, there are those to whom her disappearance is no mystery—and you, I feel assured, Mr. Basil-Leigh, are of that number!"

"For God's sake, Lady Leycour, reflect upon your language! *I* Cecile Fayne's keeper? I cannot even dream whither she has been carried by her low-born protector. Do you realize the gravity of your insinuations?"

“Mr. Basil-Leigh, this farce is too transparent. Having once divested yourself of your disguise before me, it is not at all necessary to resume it. I am addressing you now in your true character, and certainly there is no need of your attempting to conceal it. The only demand I make of you is confidence in my honour and tact—you know, Mr. Basil-Leigh, that you can trust me; that the fearful secret which was in this room exposed to me not so long ago, lies buried with happier recollections. You are aware that I could say the word, and perhaps it is a sin that I do not, which would deprive you of all social, as well as all ecclesiastical position in this land, at least. It was upon this knowledge that I based my hopes—added, it is true, to a lingering faith in your confidence in me. You can judge how much it has cost me to put myself in this position towards you, knowing as I do how deeply buried are all

human affections in your heart, and that there is nothing living or kindly to which I may appeal. Yet with this knowledge, for Cecil's sake, I have mortified flesh and spirit, and humble myself to ask a favour. Gabriel! Gabriel. Has every noble impulse been steeped in Lethe? Is there no generous chord in your nature left unbroken to respond to my piteous appeal for help? Not one spark of heaven-born compassion for the poor defenceless girl from whom have been wrested hope, love, liberty, and even a fair name? Oh, think how to manage it, Gabriel, my discretion will be boundless, and the means of rescue unwhispered. The knowledge which Cecile has obtained, I can promise for her, will never be used against you." He started and compressed his lips, as she continued in a voice quivering with emotion. "And if my prayers for you, and my gratitude, add one feather's weight to your happiness,

I will pray day and night while I recall each hour the grateful memory of this !”

“ Will you believe me, Milicent, that I cannot aid you? I know no more than you where the girl has gone, all unworthy as she is of your devotion. Have you been to Rook's Dene, Milicent? No! Then go, and learn to what a heart-stricken mother has been brought by the daughter's frailty. Go to the priestly brother in whose honour you have so much faith. He will tell you how, in the first steps of her downward way, he met her with the chosen companion of her flight. Seek the fierce catholic-hating officer, who saw her with that same companion take refuge together in the carriage, so cleverly forthcoming to carry her another stage on her disgraceful journey. Question the servants at Rook's Dene, and hear their corroborative testimony to her mad infatuation for the Italian. Pardon my speaking in a strain to bring a

blush upon your pure cheek. But you have heard of the bold audacity of the pair, with which they sought to convert a sacred place of worship into an unhallowed haunt of assignation. She then crowns her offences by going forth to divert attention from her own weakness and wickedness, to circulate stories of mysterious interviews and papal plots, which if not so wicked, would be amusing, and give ground for a charitable belief that a misplaced passion had turned the poor weak head. No, no, Milicent, since you have appealed to the chains with which you once held me in captivity, by their very memory I could not stretch forth a hand to return the fallen girl to your pure companionship, if I had the power, which I have not—and——”

He paused, for Lady Milicent stood erect before him. His gaze could not but droop as he glanced at her countenance. Her cheek was burning and her eye flashed

haughtily. There was withering scorn in her voice and in the gesture with which she waved him from her.

“ You say well, Gabriel Basil-Leigh, you have brought a blush to my cheek, and a shock to my notions of purity. But it is for you and for this monstrous revelation of iniquity in your breast. *And I have loved you!* And it is not so very long since that you made my poor credulous heart believe you worshipped this frail idol of clay!” She covered her eyes for a moment, with the shrinking expression with which one shuts out a ghastly sight, and actually reeled as she sank into the nearest seat. “ Was ever God more merciful to me! Was ever escape more blessed!” she exclaimed, as she looked again towards him. “ I hope,” she continued, in a voice so exquisitely pathetic that it must have touched all that was human in his heart, “ I hope it is not often given to woman to look upon such depths of treachery where

once the richest treasures of her nature have been trusted! I humbly apologize for having brought you here. I can only add that I have entirely mistaken you. And thus I dismiss you, for ever I trust, from my presence, certainly never again to enter my thoughts with one association of tenderness, or with one regretful glance across the deep wide chasm which separates us here and hereafter. Up to this hour, I have recalled you to my mind as the victim of a mistaken self-immolation, which involved the sacrifice of myself as well. Henceforth—but I will spare you. This, after all, perchance will be my saving hour, although I have experienced something keenly resembling the relentless knife with which the surgeon's hand severs the corrupting member. What is left of the poor mutilated body, is saved for life and future usefulness. I once prayed here that God would bless and guard you. I now pray that He may for-

give you, and protect the helpless ones who may be brought under your misguided influence and fatal direction. I thank you for the promptness with which you answered my summons. I will no longer detain you."

She withdrew at once from the room, leaving him in no enviable state of mind, humiliated certainly, if not repentant, as he left the house with the last tender association to the place and its noble mistress sundered. One thing was very sure. If Lady Millicent had penetrated the inmost depths in his nature, he likewise had had a clearer revelation of the crystal purity of her character than he had ever obtained during the years of their daily intercourse.

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